

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 71

NUGGETS AND NERVE

The Two Boy Miners

BY
**FRANK
SHERIDAN**

"Stay hyur!" he commanded. "By golly! look there!" As the boys looked up they saw a savage-looking Sioux staring at them.

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A Different Complete Story Every Week

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NUGGETS AND NERVE;

OR,

The Two Boy Miners.

By FRANK SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG MINERS.

"How goes it, Jack?"

"I'm dead beat, and that's a fact."

"Don't give up like that, pard."

"I don't intend to, Tom; but I am so weak and—
There, you will think I am a baby to talk of being nervous."

"Nervous; well, that's rather rich, I must say; but I got back as soon as I could."

"I know that, Tom."

The speaker sighed wearily and rested his head on his hands, as though about to give way to grief.

"You didn't ask what news I've got."

"No, no, Tom; forgive me, but I've been so bad while you were away, that—"

"It will be all right now, Jack. I've struck it rich, I can tell you. I've found a bully place, and here's gold, Jack—heaps of it—but you are not listening. Why, by golly, he's fainted."

Whereupon Tom Dolan started off with his canteen and filled it with water, with which he bathed the other's face.

"Poor chap," he murmured; "he's too weak for this

kind of life, and I'll bet a dollar he's had no food for some days."

He saw signs of returning consciousness, and so, after wrapping a blanket round his comrade, left him, to prepare an appetizing supper.

Tom Dolan and Jack Chambers were boys. Not only in miners' parlance—where hoary-headed men are called by the juvenile appellation—but in years.

Jack Chambers was a Brooklyn lad, and had only just passed his seventeenth birthday, while Tom Dolan was proud of his age, which amounted to a year more than his companion, he having celebrated his eighteenth birthday nearly two months before we make their acquaintance.

Tom hailed from Bridgeport, and had fallen in with one of Barnum's men, whose yarns about the gold fields of California had fired his youthful enthusiasm, and made him resolve that at the first opportunity he, too, would seek the "glittering ore" amid the glories of the Golden State.

When he was fourteen he had to go out into the world and earn his living, and not having money enough to go to California, he tried New York.

As he had no one dependent on him, he could save every cent of his earnings after paying for his board. He became almost miserly, saving every penny toward the

time of which he dreamed when he could go to the gold fields.

Tom Dolan was a strong, healthy, athletic lad, without father, mother or relations, as far as he knew.

One day fate or accident threw him in the way of Jack Chambers, a gentlemanly boy a year younger than himself.

Jack was the only son of a widowed mother, and was the pride of her life. Mrs. Chambers had a small house of her own, and a very moderate income, which she increased by taking boarders.

Jack interceded with his mother for his friend Tom, and for nearly a year the two boys shared the same bed, and breathed into each other's ears their ambitions and hopes.

Both boys were fond of reading, and when Custer sent home his report of the rich gold deposits in the Black Hills the boys grew delirious with ambitious joy.

"Let us go, Jack."

"I would like to," was the response.

From that moment both boys had but one hope, one ambition, and that was to invade the country of the treacherous Sioux Indians, and take the gold which lay in its rivers and imbedded in its hills.

When Jack Chambers had passed his sixteenth birthday, he and Tom Dolan were able to start for the promised land of wonders and wealth.

They had followed the tide of immigration, and had been with the first ill-fated settlers of Custer City.

Ill luck attended them, and both had to suffer privations to which they had hitherto been strangers.

Jack was delicate, and the hard work of the mines had told upon him.

Custer City was deserted, and the claim our young miners worked was far away from the new settlement.

Tom had been away for a week prospecting, and when he returned, found his companion and partner weak and low spirited.

Tom Dolan had made a most appetizing supper, and was well rewarded when Jack suddenly roused himself from his bed of skins, and exclaimed:

"Tom! Tom, old fellow, that smells good."

"Ay, Jack, and it will taste good, too; come along and try it. Are you strong enough?"

"Of course! What do you take me for? But there, I know that I am only a trouble to you."

"Shut up! That's miners' lingo for you, but you rile me when you talk such rubbish."

The boys ate heartily, and Jack's cheeks, which had been as white as the snow which capped the mountain, began to glow and brighten in color, while his eyes sparkled with returning health.

Alas! it had been hunger which had prostrated him.

"Now, pard, what news?"

"Good, Jack; I've struck it rich this time."

"Where, how, and when do we go?" asked Jack, all in a breath.

"Don't ask so much. I will tell you in my own way."

"Yes, do; but, Tom, I got so weary and lonely while you were away."

"After I left you, I struck right into the hills," said Tom, when he had settled himself comfortably in the tent, "and first day struck nothing but a root of a tree,

which caused me to measure my length on the ground," and the boy laughed at the misadventure. "I camped out that night, and early next morning found a log cabin, in which a number of miners were drinking. They took me for a tenderfoot at once, and asked what I'd drink.

"Coffee would be good," I answered, whereupon they started into a good big laugh. 'Whisky or death,' said one. 'Now, then, tenderfoot, which is it?'

"Neither," I answered. Well, you should have seen the fellows. They swore and raved, and politely told me I must take my medicine like a man.

"One fellow poured out about half a pint of whisky, and holding it out, said:

"'You've got to drink that.'

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Then let me tell you, pards, I wouldn't drink it if Gen. Custer himself or Ulysses S. Grant said so."

"But I'll make you."

"Oh, that's different," I said, and I took the can. Holding it up, I asked those present if I must drink it, but only the one who gave it answered, and he said 'Yes.' 'All right,' I answered, and raised the can, while the bravado stood grinning at me, stooping, with his hands resting on his knees. 'Swallow it down, tenderfoot,' he said, but the next instant he was swearing and cursing, dancing about the place like a mad fellow; he sputtered and spat, rubbed his eyes, and at last rolled on the floor frantic with pain. What caused it? Why, I flung the whole stuff, into which he had put some red pepper and powder, right into his face. It went into his eyes and up his nose. It smarted him all over, and, what was the worst for him, everybody said it served him right."

Tom had thoroughly enjoyed the telling of the story, and as he thought over the scene which he had described, his eyes filled with tears, and his sides fairly shook with laughter.

"You made an enemy there," said Jack, as soon as Tom's laughter subsided.

"Yes, I guess so; oh, how he roared! Barnum's lions were nothing to it. But he is too great a coward ever to do us any harm. But I must tell you about the claim. I walked on down the hill until I reached the gulch southeast of Custer City, and there I——"

"Not there, surely?"

"Why not?"

"It is Dead Man's Hollow, Tom."

"What of that?"

Jack Chambers shuddered, for he knew how some pioneers, several years before Gen. Custer invaded the Black Hills, had gone into the gulch, and had excavated shafts and put sluice boxes in position, and took out some gold; and that they were surprised by the murderous Sioux and indiscriminately slaughtered, not one surviving to report the terrible fate of his companions and the value of their discoveries.

Jack knew all this, and he also knew that many had gone into the gulch and staked out claims, but had only stayed a short time.

But now, his own partner, knowing as much as he did, had actually proposed going to Dead Man's Hollow.

"You are not afraid, are you?"

"No; and yet——"

"Dead men tell no tales," added Tom.

"That's true, and we may be dead very soon."

"We may—but you were wishing for it just now."

"I will go where you think best, Tom."

"Spoken like a man. I have staked out a claim, put our names upon it, and I bet it will be a bad lookout if any fellow jumps the claim; eh, Jack?"

"But what if some one has already been there. We'll be claim jumpers, then."

"Oh, we are safe, and I tell you, the sight of the yellow dust will make you as strong as a—lion tamer."

Tom Dolan drew most of his similes from the animal kingdom and the men associated therewith in his Bridgeport home, and he knew no ideal of strength greater than that possessed by the keeper and tamer of the leonine monarch of the forest and jungle.

CHAPTER II.

CLAIM THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-THREE.

Two days passed over the heads of the young miners before they resolved on starting.

Jack was weak, and required a lot of toning up before he could do a good share of work.

On the morning of the third day, the boys got all their tools together, and fastened them on the back of a mule, which looked far fatter than its masters.

They then bade good-by to their first home in the diggings and started for the new El Dorado.

All day they journeyed, without meeting with any adventure.

When night came, they lighted a fire and made themselves comfortable, with the sky for a roof and the grass for a bed.

While they were sitting by the fire, they discoursed on their prospects.

"Wish we could strike a miner who would join us," said Tom.

"Yes, but whom could we trust?"

"That's a fact, there are few of the practical miners who would act on the square with two boys."

"I would."

The boys were startled at the voice, which came so sudden and answered so apropos.

They looked round and saw a strange man, with a lean and hungry look, his eyes glaring with a fierce expression, and his clothes only worthy of being called rags.

"Who are you?" asked Tom.

The intruder approached the fire, and, without invitation, sat down.

"Got any grub?" he asked.

"A little."

"Give me some."

"Who are you, and where did you come from?"

The man laughed, but made no answer to the question.

"Look here, stranger!" exclaimed Tom, "we are youngsters; neither of us know much about mining, and we want a partner—that's all true; but if you think, because we are boys, you can impose upon us—why, you make a mistake, that's all."

The man laughed, and rubbed his hands as though highly pleased.

"You're a plucky un," he said.

"Thanks. But if you don't care to introduce yourself, all I can say is you had better move on."

"An' if I refuse?"

"Then we will make you."

"That's good; rich, scrumptious. I——"

And the stranger tapped significantly the handle of a pistol. He gained nothing by that, for Tom had drawn his revolver as quick as a flash and pointed at the stranger, getting dead rock on him sure.

"Now, then, draw that if you dare," said Tom, as with one hand he pointed at the stranger's weapon.

"Put up yer shootin' irons. I ain't no red nor darned skunk either."

There was something about the man which was far from prepossessing, yet the boys would not send him away hungry.

He ate ravenously and silently, but when he had finished he asked:

"Down Easters, ain't yer?"

"Yes."

"Thought so. I'm from that way myself."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yer needn't sneer; I wasn't allus like this. I went to high school, I did; but I lost all my book learnin'."

"I should say so. Where did you hail from?"

"New Haven. If that suits yer fancy."

"Are you joking?"

"Not much."

"Well, what do you want?"

"You want a pard?"

"Well?"

"I'm your man."

"How do we know that?"

"Now look hyur, youngsters, you air no better than tenderfoots—I know yer; yer could easily have ten dollars' worth of gold in yer pan an' throw it away. I'm up to it all. I've been thar."

"What share do you want?"

"That's biz. If yer hev a claim staked out give me a quarter share; if yer ain't, an' we hev to find one, I'll take a third 'long with yer. Call that square?"

"That's so."

"Waal?"

"We must think over it. Stay with us to-night, and in the morning we will decide."

"That's good. Now, youngster, I hev had 'sperience in 'Frisco an' here, an' if yer takes me in the firm, why, you'll never get scared when ye thinks of it."

The stranger miner looked around, got all the bearings of the improvised camp, saw the weakest point in case of an attack, and then threw himself on the ground and was soon fast asleep, or appeared so.

The boys rolled themselves in their blankets close to each other, for they wanted to talk.

"What do you think, Tom?"

"What say you, Jack?"

Then they both laughed. They were the best of friends and most indulgent of partners. Neither liked to express his opinion, for fear the other would give in rather than oppose.

"Now come, Jack," continued Tom Dolan, "don't laugh. You are the youngest, and the capitalist——"

Tom found further utterance checked, for Jack's hand was pressed firmly over his mouth.

"Don't refer to that again, or I'll leave you and strike out for myself," said Jack, spiritedly.

"But it's true, nevertheless. Now, don't get on your dignity, Jack. If your mother had not lent us fifty dollars we should not have been here."

"That's true; but haven't you nursed me, and once, at least, saved my life? So we are more than equal, and I am in debt to you."

"Oh, stow all that, Jack, and let us talk biz. What about——" And Tom pointed over his shoulder to the place where their strange guest was apparently sleeping soundly.

"To be candid, I rather like him," said Jack, in a loud whisper.

"So do I."

"Then it's settled?"

"I guess so; but we'll bind him down for three months."

"Ha! ha! ha! Spoken like a real tenderfoot," and Jack laughed heartily.

"What are you laughing about?"

"As though a piece of paper or a signature would bind a miner here! The only agreement is that when we find him playing false, we'll tell him to 'get,' and with our hands or certain weapons make him obey."

"Bravely spoken, Jack. And, now, to sleep."

When the boys awoke in the morning they were agreeably surprised to find a good breakfast waiting for them.

Their new friend had shot a bird, and cooked it delicately, while he had prepared some kind of hot cake from meal which was appetizing.

"I guessed yer might be hungry," he said, by way of apology.

The man acted as though he knew he was a partner, and busied himself about the camp, making the boys comfortable.

After breakfast Tom looked at the man, sizing him up for a minute, and then held out his hand.

"When shall we start, pard?"

"Hev yer got a claim?"

"Yes."

"Good. Where is it?"

"Dead Man's Hollow."

"By golly! Air yer speaking truth?"

"Yes, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'll go, but——"

"What! are you afraid?"

"No, no; but let me tell yer that many hev bin there, an' got the yellow by the bushel, but when they were ready to leave, they stayed—by golly they did!"

"You mean they were killed."

"Thet's it! Yer hev struck it."

"We will risk all that."

"Bully for yer! I'm with yer."

An hour later the three were on their way down the side of the hill, and within sight of the gulch in which they had determined to try their luck.

After a long and weary tramp Tom ran forward, never stopping until he had reached a tree whose branches overhung a small stream.

When the others reached him he stood in mock theatric fashion, one arm across his breast, and the other ex-

tended, with the index finger pointing to something on the tree.

Following the indication of his hand, Jack read:

"CLAIM 333.

"Owned by Tom Dolan and Jack Chambers.

"KEEP OFF."

"Well, by golly!" exclaimed the new partner.

"What's the matter, pard?"

"By golly!" he exclaimed again. "When I was out in 'Frisco, claim three hundred and thirty-three did more in a week than all the other claims panned out in a month. You've struck it. There's but one thing, and thet——"

"Is, shall we get out with our gold, eh?"

"Thet's it."

"Well, we shall have to risk that, and as a third is yours——"

"Fourth, yer mean——"

"No, no; we take yer in even or not at all."

"Tip us yer hand, youngsters; I'll stand by yer as long as 'Frisco Bill 'as got a leg to stand on."

"'Frisco Bill! Is that what you are called?"

"Yes, youngsters—pards, I should say; my name was William Huntley, but after that little affair in 'Frisco I was called 'Frisco Bill, an' it's stuck to me."

"What little affair do you refer to?"

"Story's too long. Will tell you some time when nights are long."

All three set to work with vigor and enthusiasm to get the place in order, and get the tent fixed.

There was a feeling of thankfulness in the hearts of the two boys that they had fallen in with a true man, as they believed 'Frisco Bill to be.

Under all the man's roughness there was the gentleman, and at times he dropped the jargon in use by miners, and spoke as well as many of his old friends in the far-famed Eastern Elm City, within whose precincts there existed the world-renowned home of students and learning—Yale.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE WARNING.

The next day, at the suggestion of 'Frisco Bill, the party separated, each taking his pan, and trying which could find the best locate.

Our young miners had been long enough at the mines to know that it was not all easy work.

Picking up gold is one thing, but mining for it another, and the young fellows knew that often very hard work had to be done for very little gold.

There was but one scruple about moving away from the claim staked out by Tom Dolan—they might be claim jumpers.

"No, by gosh!" said 'Frisco Bill, "there has never been a pick put in here, I'll sw'ar. But how come you to put up three hundred and thirty-three, eh?"

"Well, pard, I found three hundred and thirty, but no higher number, and so to make sure I went three higher."

"Good! Now off with your pans."

Tom and Jack went down to the bed of the stream, and

fished up a lot of the gravel and dirt and put it in their pans.

They worked away until by repeated washings only a handful of gravel and dirt remained.

"Tom, look here," exclaimed Jack Chambers.

Dolan joined his comrade and saw him picking little pieces of gold from the pan. Many were as small as pin heads, but when collected aggregated considerable value.

"I told you I'd struck it rich," answered Tom, at the same time showing the contents of his pan, which had realized nearly an ounce.

Jack was not satisfied altogether, for he had suddenly entertained an ambition to be rich.

He followed the course of the stream a short distance and saw that it was fed by a little rivulet which trickled down the mountain side.

Climbing up the steep rocks, he found a little basin containing several gallons of water. The basin or hollow in the rock had evidently been shaped by the action of the water which had trickled down there for centuries.

The water looked so clear that Jack felt he would like a good drink of it.

He stooped down, and was about to put his lips into the water, when a little green lizard dived into the basin and muddled the water.

"Confound you!" ejaculated Jack, angrily, as he saw how he had been cheated out of his drink. "Well, I can wait, it will soon get clear again."

He was lying down on the rock, looking into the water, when something attracted his attention.

He stretched out his hands and pushed them into the accumulation of mud and stones at the bottom.

He scooped up a quantity and put it in his pan.

After a little manipulation and few washings, he saw a lot of the yellow dust he was seeking.

He washed it again, and then seeing Bill a little distance below him, called out:

"Bill!"

"Ay, Jack, where are yer?"

"Up here. Raise up your head and you can see."

'Frisco Bill caught sight of him, and in a few bounds was by his side.

"Well, pard?" he asked.

"Look at that pan, Bill."

"By golly, pard! That's worth a clean five hundred."

"Is it?"

"I guess it is. You've struck a pocket."

"I'll call Tom."

"Don't do anything of the sort. He's doing well; go on and get what yer can."

Jack picked out the gold and again scooped up a quantity of the mud and gravel.

The second panned out as good as the first, and he was elated with his success.

"If we can find the vein, we're rich," said 'Frisco Bill. "I'll search for it to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"Cause when I start I keep on till I find what I look for."

It was lonesome there in that gulch, and miles had to be traversed before another human being could be found.

Jack expressed his lonesomeness to his partners, and Bill at once set his fears at rest.

"Guess you'll hev more company than is pleasant, if you strike many more pockets like thet."

"How so?"

"If we strike gold, an' stay here a week, we'll have a thousand miners within a month."

"But haven't they been here?"

"Yes, but none stayed a week—two days was about all—"

"Jack—'Frisco Bill!"

It was Tom Dolan's voice at the bottom of the gulch. "Coming."

Jack and his companion hurried down the side of the hill to the place where Dolan was standing.

"What is it?" asked both, in a breath.

"A strange thing has happened. I can't explain it, but I was scooping up the gravel from the bed here, when something struck me on the back—"

"Of course!" assented 'Frisco Bill.

"Why do you say 'of course?'"

"Go on, I'll tell yer presently."

"Tell me now."

"It's usual in the hollow."

"What is?"

"Why, ever since— But thar, I don't want to scare yer—"

"Say on, Bill; you can't frighten me."

"Clear grit, ain't he?" said Bill, turning to Jack.

"That he is, none more so," responded Jack Chambers.

"Tell us what you mean, Bill," said Tom, earnestly.

"Waal, it's mebbe only miners' yarns, but it is said as how every miner who stakes out a claim gets a friendly notice to quit, after he has camped here one night."

"A friendly notice?"

"Yes, a stone thrown at him, or something of that kind, and if that don't give him hint enough, he gets a bit of lead."

"Oh!"

"Are you frightened, Jack?"

"No, Tom; not I."

"Well, Jack, and you, 'Frisco Bill, had better know that I was struck in the back with a——"

"Stone?"

"No, a skull—a human skull!"

"By gosh! but that's bad."

Tom laughed, and picked up a skull which the others had not noticed.

"I looked all round, but could not see anyone, but thought it queer."

"Most likely it rolled off the rocks up there," said Jack.

"Mebbe so! mebbe so!" assented 'Frisco Bill, as he moved away.

The old miner was uneasy, and as he walked along the creek, he mused:

"What's it mean, anyway? Are those devils at work ag'in? Will they harm the lad? Not if 'Frisco Bill can help it—no, not by a long chalk."

By all which it appears that there was some mystery about Dead Man's Hollow, and that Bill Huntley knew something about it.

Was he a friend of the boys, or was he in league with those who would destroy them?

Time must be left to solve that strange conundrum,

for those were days when no man dare trust another, not even his own brother.

Tom was certain that the skull had been thrown at him, but he treated the matter lightly, because he knew that Jack was far from strong-nerved.

Both looked to their guns and revolvers, and determined to keep a strict watch, even while they worked.

CHAPTER IV.

A NOCTURNAL SURPRISE.

'Frisco Bill thought for a long time over the warning which had been given to his young partner.

He walked along the creek and began to ascend the hill.

"Bah! I'm getting to be an old fool," he said, and at once turned back.

He had reached the side of his partners, who were still talking about the strange adventure, and stood listening to them, leaning all the time on the muzzle of his gun.

Up the hillside, where the shadows of the rocks were deepest, stood a man, whose face was diabolical in its expression.

He stood with folded arms, watching the boys below.

"So they, too, court death, do they? They shall have it. My brother's blood calls for vengeance, and there has not been enough blood shed yet."

The man talked fluently and well.

Whoever he was, he had evidently been well educated, and had none of the jargon used by the miners.

He was well armed, and presented a most formidable appearance.

By his side lay a skeleton of a man, and near by was a pile of skulls.

He looked down at the miners, and then threw himself on the ground by the side of the skeleton.

"George—George!" he exclaimed, in tones of anguish, "they shall die. They killed you, my brother, and none shall live—no, not one. I will warn them once again."

He rose to his feet, and, taking a skull in his hand, flung it into the valley beneath.

It struck 'Frisco Bill on the shoulder and rolled down into the creek.

"By golly! that's hot," shouted Bill, as the strange weapon struck him.

He looked round, but no one was in sight; he looked up, but all was black as midnight.

"They're at it ag'in," he said; "but whether they are demons or reds, 'Frisco Bill is going to get even with them."

Turning to the half-frightened boys, he said:

"Don't take any notice of these hyur things; they ain't of no account."

But though he tried to cheer them, it was evident that he was only partially successful.

"I'll watch to-night," he said, when the hour for sleep had arrived.

The boys entered their tent, and having full confidence in 'Frisco Bill, soon slept soundly, notwithstanding their fears.

Bill climbed the mountain, and reached the place where the skeleton and pile of skulls were.

No sign of life was visible—nothing but the bleached, white bones of a man and a heap of ghastly, staring skulls.

"Mebbe one of them things," pointing to the skulls, "rolled down, an' mebbe it didn't."

Not at all conclusive reasoning, but apparently satisfactory to Bill; for, after making a thorough search of the place, and finding neither cave nor hiding place for human being, he descended and reached the tent.

Curiosity, or some stranger and stronger impulse, led him to the great tree on which Tom Dolan had inscribed the names of himself and friend as owners of claim three hundred and thirty-three.

He looked at it, even though the moon had become temporarily obscured by clouds and the tree stood in darkness.

His eyes never left it for an instant, and when the silver orb of night pierced the blackness of the clouds and illuminated the tree, he uttered an oath.

With his hands pushed deep into his pockets, he stood with eyes riveted on the tree.

What was it which so astonished him?

What had paralyzed him so that he could not remove his eyes from the inscription?

The minutes lengthened into an hour, but still he moved not.

Nearly two hours passed, and then, with a muttered oath, he walked away.

"Shall I wake the young uns?" he mused. "No; what's the good?" he asked himself.

But he had uttered the question aloud, and Tom Dolan had overheard it.

Springing up, he tapped Bill on the shoulder.

"What's the matter, pard?"

"Waal, I don't know, an' that's a fact."

"Something troubles you. Out with it, old friend."

"The writin'—"

"What writing?"

"On the tree; did you alter it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, his face blanching as he did so.

He followed Bill to the tree and looked up at the inscription.

The names of himself and Jack had been cut away, and below another had been inserted.

It now read:

"CLAIM 333.

"Owned by

"KEEP OFF.

"DICK GALVIN."

"Whose work is that?" asked Tom.

"That's what I'd like to know," was the old miner's answer.

"It has been changed while we slept."

"I know it. An' I never was out of sight of the camp, neither."

"Who is Dick Galvin?"

"I'm blowed if I know."

"Jack must know. Ah, here he comes."

Chambers was as much surprised as the others, but,

after a perceptible shudder, took the matter philosophically.

"I tell you what, comrades," he said, "this is Dead Man's Hollow, and some prospector is keeping it for some purpose for himself. He wants to frighten all miners away. It is the work of some one who is too cowardly to show himself. I vote we take no notice of it, but get our breakfast."

This suggestion was both wise and practical, and even the old miner laughed at the youth, who in the presence of a most singular, almost supernatural manifestation, should think of eating.

Carefully erasing the name of Dick Galvin, Tom followed the others to the tent and soon, to all appearance, all three were engrossed with their morning meal.

Jack revisited the scene of his great success, this time accompanied by Dolan, while 'Frisco Bill tramped up by the course of the rivulet, to find the vein, from which undoubtedly the gold had been washed.

The boys set to work and scooped out all the gravel and mud from the hollow in the rock, and were rewarded by finding several ounces of pure gold.

Before the day was out several other pockets were found, and each of the young miners had made two or three hundred dollars by their day's toil.

"What is a pocket, pard?" asked Jack Chambers, who, though he had often used the word, was not clear as to its exact meaning.

"Well, pards, it's this way. Somewheres up the hillside thar must be a big vein of the yellow. A big rain comes, an' a great flood sweeps down the gorge, dislodging everything before it; in course lots of the stuff comes down with it, an' being heavy, it stops wherever thars a hole. That hole we calls a pocket.

"Then wherever we find a pocket there must be a vein?"

"I guess so. An' then with picks an' what we call elbow grease we can get rich—if the vein is a good one."

That was why the experienced miner had determined there was a vein near by.

The gold found in the pockets was exceedingly fine, and was worth nearly its weight in dollars, the proportion of dross was so small.

Every day the same routine was followed. The boys doing well with the pockets and gravelly bed of the creek, and 'Frisco Bill prospecting for the vein which he was sure he could find.

He was rather disheartened to think that he had spent several days fruitlessly, but was still sanguine that success must come in the near future.

Strange to say, the miners were not disturbed in their claim. The nocturnal visitor who had carved the name of Dick Galvin on the tree, had not returned, neither had any more skulls fallen or been thrown into the gulch.

Jack and Tom had got over their fright, and were happy in the wild and free life they were leading.

CHAPTER V.

A FEARFUL PERIL.

"I've struck it, boys, an' we're rich as—what's that old fellow's name we used to read about at school?" exclaimed 'Frisco Bill, as he rushed down the hillside, stumbling and

falling, rolling and slipping, until he reached the place where the boys were washing the gravel.

"What are you talking about?" asked Jack.

The old miner was breathless, and had to sit down on a rock and fan himself before he could speak again.

His bronzed and weather-beaten face shone as though he had rubbed it with oil, and his arms were covered with perspiration.

"Come hyur!" he said, when he had got breath enough. "Claim three hundred and thirty-three is a bonanzy."

"Bonanza, you mean," corrected Jack.

"Waal, yes. I know you try to polish up old Bill Huntley, an' already I talk so thet my pards in 'Frisco wouldn't know me."

"Go on, Bill. What's the news?"

"Why, boys, pards, friends——"

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears," shouted Jack, in heroic fashion, whereat even 'Frisco Bill had to laugh.

"Listen to me——"

"While I a tale unfold," added Jack, in whom the very spirit of mischief seemed suddenly developed.

"Stop it, Jack, and let's hear the news."

"All serene; go on, pard."

"I've found the vein!"

"You have?"

"Yes."

"What's it like?"

"There's 'nuff gold in it to make each of us as rich as——"

"Cresus," put in Tom Dolan.

"That's it, to a T. Now we've got to quit."

"What do you mean?"

"We must stake out our claims an' build our shanty within ten days."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"But that won't be claim three hundred and thirty-three."

"Why not? We haven't sunk a shaft hyur."

"Well, what next?"

"Then we'll work like blazes, an' go back East rich—rich——"

"Or, not at all," said Tom, solemnly.

"Why say that?"

"Oh, I was thinking I would never go back unless I were rich," answered Dolan; but his words did not satisfy his comrades, for both felt that under it all there was a kind of indefinite feeling that he would not live to return.

"Get your picks," said Bill, "an' we'll go an' stake out our claim."

The boys shouldered their picks and climbed up the side of the hill, keeping close to the washout all the way.

The old miner showed them which way the vein was likely to run, and then they set to work and marked the boundary of three claims, two being due north and the third due east.

"Now then, pards, get to work; dig away for an hour, an' then we'll build our shanty."

The three commenced in right good earnest, and at every stroke the old miner encouraged them.

"Rich—we'll be millionaires in a month," he said. "But

there's somethin' queer about this place. I'll tell ye about it."

The two boys sat down to listen to 'Frisco Bill's story. "Stay hyur!" he commanded. "By golly! look there."

He pointed to a bold, projecting rock a hundred yards away.

As the boys looked up they saw a savage-visaged Sioux glaring at them.

Bill raised his rifle, and the report was followed by a howl of pain.

Another howl woke the echoes and the body of the Sioux came rolling down into the gulch.

"I'll go up an' see if any more are ready for such pills," Bill remarked, as he began to climb the rocks.

He had nearly reached the point where the Indian had stood when the gleaming blade of a tomahawk circled itself round his head.

Before the murderous weapon could descend a bullet had gone through the head of the Indian and he rolled down into the valley.

"Scalp safe this time, I guess," said Bill, and then turning to the boys:

"That was a good shot of yourn, or I should have lost my scalp. I didn't see the skunk."

The miner reached the gulch just as a wild war whoop from a dozen Indian throats sounded deafeningly in their ears.

A dozen painted devils, and only one man and two boys to drive them back.

It was a fearful peril.

The three brave defenders of the gulch made ready for a tussle with the savages.

The redskins got within easy range of the rocks, and by preconcerted plan fired a volley at the miners.

The bullets went wide of the mark, but Jack was being crowded by three redskins on his side, and each minute he expected to be his last.

He fired steadily enough, but only succeeded in killing one of the horses. A fierce-looking savage rushed at the boy and raised his tomahawk, ready to strike. Jack had lost his presence of mind, but the sight of the shining weapon roused him, and he pointed his revolver at the fellow's heart and pulled the trigger.

With an unearthly yell the Indian gave a bound in the air and fell dead.

Bill crawled on his hands and knees round the bowlders which formed the barricade, keeping in the shadow all the time.

When he had got completely round, he began to crawl up the side of the hill.

After ascending some dozen or twenty yards he turned, and with a revolver in each hand fired five or six shots in rapid succession.

The Indians were surprised. It seemed to them that the miners had been re-enforced. They turned to the opposite side to get out of range of Bill's fire, when a puff of smoke and a report came from the hillside.

The chief fell to the ground, dead, and the others were maddened into fury.

Again and again shots were fired from the mountain-side, opposite to where 'Frisco Bill was still blazing away.

The savages could not understand it. They were not the only ones who were surprised, for 'Frisco Bill, when he saw the first shot fired with such good effect from the

opposite side, slapped his thigh with his big left hand, pulled the trigger of his rifle with his right, and exclaimed:

"Waal, I'm jiggered!"

Tom and Jack were equally nonplused. But whoever fired the strange shots, it was evident, could not be much in favor of the Indians.

The Sioux were mad. They rushed forward, firing blindly and doing no damage. One big painted fellow gave a yell and bounded upon Tom Dolan. They rolled to the ground locked in each other's arms.

Tom found his arms pinioned securely by the Indian's firm grip.

He kicked and struggled, but could not release himself.

Transformed into a very fury, Tom managed to raise his head until his face was close to that of the Indian.

With a sudden move, he fixed his teeth in the redskin's cheek, and held on as a terrier does to a rat.

The savage howled, but Tom would not let go. Then the redskin raised his hand to strike. This freed Tom's arms, and snatching a hunting knife from his belt, he buried it in the Indian's breast.

The redskins beat a retreat. They were thoroughly scared and badly defeated, leaving seven of their number dead and two others badly wounded.

It seemed almost miraculous, but it was a fact, that our three brave miners escaped without any serious injury.

Tom Dolan had a gash on his cheek, which would leave a scar for years, to remind him of his death grapple with a Sioux, while Jack had a furrow plowed through his shoulder, but not deep enough to be serious.

"I guess the rapsCALLIONS hev had enough this while," said 'Frisco Bill, after all trace of the battle had been removed.

"Who fired from that side?" asked Jack, pointing to the place where the unknown had so mysteriously aided them.

"That's what I'd like to know. Guess it must have been some of the—— But what's the use——"

"Tell us what you mean?"

"Nothin', nothin'!"

"Yes, you do; we ain't babies to be frightened with a story," said Jack.

"No, my boy, I guess not, for you've had yer baptism of fire, an' no mistake."

"Tell us, then."

"Well, some one will tell yer, so I may as well; why not?"

"Out with it then, Bill, unless you are too tired."

"I am tired, that's a fact; but we darsen't sleep, so it may help to keep us awake."

"Once upon a time—that's how the story book puts it, I think?" commenced 'Frisco Bill, when he had filled his old black pipe, which had traveled many a year as his constant companion, and had settled down to tell a good yarn of the olden days when a white man in the Black Hills was as scarce as snow in the tropics.

"Well, as I was saying, once there landed in this here very gulch a man an' his wife an' little gal—though what in thunder a man wants with his b'longings in diggin's like this, I could never make out."

"Human nature," interposed Tom.

"I guess so. Well, the white man, whose soul was as

white as his face, came here promisc'ous like to look for the shiny——"

"Did he find it?" asked Jack, who was always wanting to know the conclusion of a story almost before it was commenced.

"I guess he did. But don't hurry me—I must tell the yarn as I heard it—drat it!" the last expression was addressed to his pipe, which had ceased to draw, for the simple reason that the fire in its bowl had burned itself out. Again the curling smoke arose from the rank-smelling tobacco. 'Frisco Bill continued:

"The fellow camped somewhere about here, an' for a few days the family went in for some real natural enjoyment. For weeks the chap lingered, always bringing to camp a lot of the shiny, an' every night resolvin' that they would get up and get toward the East once more.

"Then the mornin' would send him off again to find more gold. The women folks pined for company; that was natural, for what's a gal worth if there ain't a young fellow near? They soon had company enough, for a howling, yelling horde of redskins—— What's that?"

"I didn't hear anything," said Tom.

"Nor I," added Jack.

"I'm getting a bit nervous mebbe. Well, the redskins came down into the gulch an' walked right off with the young gal."

"The wretches!" ejaculated Tom, clinching his fists as he spoke.

"Of course the fellow felt bad, an' followed sharp after 'em; what caps me is, that they didn't take his scalp. But they didn't. The rascallions took the gal across there to yonder dig-out, an' then they bound her tight to a post, an' lighted a fire round her. Didn't they yell! The red wretches danced in devilish glee round their victim. The fire leaped higher an' higher, an' the gal screeched an' squalled as though she didn't relish bein' roasted.

"The red flames crackled an' blistered her white flesh, an' the savages howled with fiendish glee. The poor old dad was quite kerflummoxed at first, an' the mother was dead in a faint, but the old man brushed up an' pulled himself together an' rushed forward, partin' the tangled brush as he went.

"He had a long knife in his hand, his only weapon, an' he jumped right into the center of the bowlin' red men.

"How they whooped, an' yelled, an' howled! The gal's dad didn't care, he scattered the burnin' wood, an' brandished the pieces in their faces, till they got blinded, then with his knife he cut the cords which fastened his daughter, an' snatchin' her up in his arms, bounded like a hungry wolf through the savages, leavin' them amazed."

'Frisco Bill paused to refill his pipe.

He walked round and examined every point by which a surprise might come, and then sat down quietly to resume his story.

"Was the girl dead?" asked Jack.

"I guess she was, an' the old man was just about mad. The savages weren't thro', for they whooped down on the little party an' carried off the gal's mother; the old fellow had got into a deep sleep—cuss 'em—for they stunned him, an' when he woke, there was his wife an' gal all cut up into joints like in a butcher's market, scattered all round him."

"What became of the man?"

"Went mad, an' lived in a cave, pickin' off any Injun as came along."

"How long is that ago?"

"Nigh on twenty years."

"Is he living yet?" asked Jack, turning his head round, as though he half expected to see the mad miner behind him.

"I guess not. Some time after, the Injuns got some of the mad miner's shiny, an' took it to a mission priest, who thought there was a human heart in an Injun's breast—what a fool, warn't he? He looked at the metal so bright an' yaller, an' preached 'em a sermon. He said: 'That yaller stuff is the white man's money. There is nothin' in this world the white man loves so much as that. To get it he will go on long journeys, where his feet have never trod before, an' will risk his life for it. Never let the white man know you found the shinin' stone, or he will send his people like grasshoppers an' take your beautiful hills from you.'

"Then the priest is at the bottom of it all," said Jack.

"Of what?"

"The murders."

"I reckon so; but don't take all for truth, my boy; it may be only a yarn."

"What right have we here, anyway?" asked Jack, after a pause. "Isn't this the Indian country? are we not thieves and robbers, taking wealth which does not belong to us?"

'Frisco Bill and Tom both laughed, and Jack blushed like a girl at the bit of honest sentiment he had given utterance to.

"You ain't heard all the yarn yet," said 'Frisco Bill.

"Oh, tell it, then."

"One day, another party of whites came here, an' the next day they was all in the happy huntin' ground, as the redskins call it. One great big Injun caught sight of the mad miner, an' swore to have his scalp. The miner was perched up there," pointing to a projecting rock, "an' Mr. Injun thought as how he could get up there an' get the scalp. He climbed chock up to the point an' gave a whoop of joy; but he was kinder grieved an' disappointed, for the mad covey stooped down and gripped the redskin by the legs, an' toppled him into the valley."

"Serve him right."

"Guess it did. There warn't a bit of bone left in the Injun's body long enough to make a whistle out on."

"Bravo, madman!" exclaimed Tom, with almost childish glee.

"The next year," continued 'Frisco Bill, "a lot of white men came here an' staked off claims, an' got a lot of shiny. They were all ready to shoulder the gold an' make for market, when a scout rushed into the valley, shoutin', 'The hills air kivered with Injuns!' and before the miners had time to get ready the rascallions, with hideously-painted faces, makin' infernal yells, rushed into the camp to try an' take it by storm."

"The whites had guns, an' they fired volley after volley, an' emptied many saddles; but what cared the Injuns? They rushed over the dead bodies, an' soon the whole gulch was filled with dead Injuns and dead whites, lyin' together as if they had been brothers. The whites warn't strong enough, though, an' were all captured. Not one was left alive."

"Their bones are all round us, an' that is why this here gulch is called 'Dead Man's Hollow.'"

'Frisco Bill finished his yarn and his pipe at the same time.

CHAPTER VI.

FRESH ARRIVALS.

Youth never worries long over anything, and after a good breakfast, and a plentiful supply of water dashed over their faces, both of the young miners felt ready to face the excitement of mining.

The vein discovered by 'Frisco Bill bade fair to be an exceedingly rich one.

All day they worked with indefatigable vigor, and after a good pile of dirt had been removed, Tom Dolan wiped the perspiration from his face, and pointing to the dirt, asked:

"Is that worth anything?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed 'Frisco Bill, with rough heartiness. "Why, bless the boy, that dirt there, as you call it, is worth fifteen or eighteen hundred dollars a ton."

"You don't mean it?"

"By gosh, I do, though, an' we are rich."

"That's good news."

"I should say so," asserted Jack.

"See hyur, boys, I'll be durned if we oughtn't to hev a town meetin'," said 'Frisco Bill, falling into the rough dialect of the miners, a dialect he used but little while talking to his copartners in claim three hundred and thirty-three.

"What do yer mean, eh, pard?" asked Tom, broadly imitating the jargon of the miner, and in such a way as to cause 'Frisco Bill to laugh.

"Well, boys, to tell the truth, when I talk to you, I am reminded of the days when I was East, an' talked straight. Sometimes I fall back an' think I'm with Buck Godkin, an' Ikey Slowfoot, an' Big Bully, an' talk as they do."

"That's all right, Bill, but what did yer mean about a town's meeting?"

"You are a little green."

"Very," assented both.

"You will be asked to sell out."

"That's good. Who is there to buy but you?"

"There'll be five hundred here in a week."

"How do you know?"

"Because we've found the yaller dust."

"Who knows?"

"No one."

"Then how will they get here?"

"By chance."

"I don't know what you mean."

"See here, pards, I've been in Californy an' here, an' I knows that no sooner does a fellow strike a rich vein than others follow quick."

"We won't tell anyone."

"Doesn't matter; they'll be here all the same."

"Well, the more the merrier."

"So say all of us," assented Tom.

"That's so, but you'll be asked to sell out, an' if you're wise you'll get a big pile for your claim."

"We shall never sell without your advice."

"That'll do. Now, boys, you took 'Frisco Bill on spec—as the sayin' is. You didn't know whether he was fish

or fowl or herrin', but he's straight, an' don't yer forget it."

"We know that, Bill."

"Shake, then."

The hands met and a new bond of friendship was struck up.

"If we had a town's meeting I should propose that we three form ourselves into a partnership, an' that if one sells, all sell, an' if one gets dissatisfied, the others should know the reason."

"Good!"

"Do you agree?"

"We do."

"Guess we should be fools not to do so," Tom Dolan remarked.

"That's settled, then?"

"It is."

"Shake."

Again the three joined hands on the new partnership, and 'Frisco Bill looked radiant with joy.

"I guess," he said, "that our three claims'll be worth half a million."

"What!" exclaimed Jack, with eyes wide open.

"Dollars."

"I say, Bill, what are you giving us?"

"Sober truth. I owns a third, an' I wouldn't sell my share, if I could, for no two hundred thousand dollars ever issued by Uncle Sam."

"Hope it is so."

"True as this is Dead Man's Hollow," answered Bill.

Two days passed without any adventure, and the boys were beginning to think they were to have the entire vein to themselves, when suddenly three miners, red-shirted and rough-looking, walked straight up to the claim.

"Well, pards, you've struck it rich," said one.

"Yes, moderately so," answered 'Frisco Bill.

"Guess I'll be a neighbor. Any 'jection to raise?"

"No; why should we have any?"

"Guessed yer might want the earth. Where's yer claim lines?"

"Can't you see? The stakes are big enough."

The miners began to size up 'Frisco Bill, and thought he was a greenhorn as well as the boys.

He talked too much like an educated man just then to suit them, and they thought they would have some fun.

"Guess your stakes ain't straight," exclaimed one of the newcomers, as he coolly pulled up a stick which 'Frisco Bill had stuck in his boundary line.

"Put that stake back."

"What if I won't?"

"I'll make you."

"Pards, hear the parson."

'Frisco Bill leaned on his pick, and coolly looking at the man, said:

"Put that stake back."

"I won't."

"You will."

"Not unless I'm made."

"If that's what you're waiting for," said 'Frisco Bill, "it makes it easier."

He walked up to the miner, and with as much ease and calmness as though nothing was the matter, struck out with his left hand with such force that, as his fist met the newcomer's face, the sound echoed through the gulch.

The fellow went down flat on his back, and when he got up he had to brush away the blood and dirt from his face.

"Do you like the medicine?" asked 'Frisco Bill, but the bully made no answer.

"Put back that stake."

The miner hesitated, and saw the sneer on the face of his companions.

"I'll be durned ef I do."

"Come on, then, and we will see who is to plant that stake."

The bully, smarting from the blow, had he been left to himself would have declined the invitation, but his pals called him coward, and sneered so much that he dare not refuse.

The two men faced each other, and for a very brief space stood with their fists raised, each waiting for the other to start.

The aggressive miner struck out at 'Frisco Bill, but his arm was met with such a powerful blow from Bill's fist that it dropped powerless to his side, while with the other hand Bill felled him to the earth.

The two miners who had forced their friend to fight made a rush at 'Frisco Bill, thinking that what one could not do two might accomplish.

"One brave man at a time is all I care for," said Bill, "but I'm ready for two cowards any time."

He struck one such a powerful blow on the right ear that he fell like a stone.

The other was gripped so firmly under 'Frisco Bill's left arm that he fancied he was being choked.

His head was in chancery, and 'Frisco Bill altered its phrenological outlines considerably before he released his hold.

"Now, then, boys," he said, "put back that stake."

It was done quickly enough, and the well-punished bully sneaked up to 'Frisco Bill and put out his hand.

"Shake," he said, feebly.

"With pleasure."

"Can we take next claim to yours?"

"Of course, and true friends we'll be."

"What's the number?" asked one of the red-shirted miners.

"Three hundred and thirty-three."

"Where on earth did you strike that?"

"A fancy—that's all."

"Then I'll make mine three hundred and thirty-five; there's luck in odd numbers."

The men staked off their claims, and soon set to work building a shanty.

Bill and the boy miners gathered up as much wood as they could, ready for a cool spell, and then rested.

"Depend upon it," said 'Frisco Bill, over his pipe that night, "the only way to treat the fellows out in these diggin's is to show 'em you ain't afeard, an' that you're master."

The next day the hollow presented a lively appearance, for a dozen more miners had appeared, nobody knew where from, and had staked out claims.

"What did I tell you?" asked 'Frisco Bill, as he pointed along the gulch, which was now alive with busy animation.

"You guessed it right," Tom assented, while Jack did not know whether to be sorry or pleased that the lonesomeness of the valley had been destroyed.

'Frisco Bill smoked more than ever—his supply of tobacco seemed to be unlimited—and was more watchful; but that was the only change to be noticed in him.

Before two weeks had passed over, two hundred claims had been staked out, and the evenings in Dead Man's Hollow were lively and noisy.

A strange sensation stirred the settlement about that time.

One morning, as the men turned out of their shanties, they saw painted on a rock which presented a smooth surface, a rude skeleton.

It was gigantic in size, and was very crude in the execution.

Who had painted it?

That was the first thought which entered each man's head.

Over the head of the skeleton an inscription was written:

"This hollow was discovered and owned by George Galvin and his party. His successor, Dick Galvin, warns all to quit at once, or they will be——"

Then followed the representation of the skeleton.

"Who done it?" asked a miner.

"I'll be durned ef I know."

"Probably that durned cuss at claim three hundred and thirty-three."

"Eh, what's that?" asked 'Frisco Bill.

"Nothin', pard. But who done that?"

"I didn't, but guess some fool who's more handy with brush than pick," answered Bill.

It was a sensation, and as all miners are more or less superstitious, they could not help feeling that there was something exceedingly mysterious about Dead Man's Hollow.

But greater sensations were to shake the nerves of these men.

Many already wished that they had never entered the gulch.

Jack was far from well, and while the others were talking about the painted skeleton, he was resting in his shanty, with his head leaning on his hand.

He was suddenly aroused by a harsh and grating laugh.

He looked up, and saw a man just inside the shanty, with his back to the door, and holding a sharp, long-bladed knife in one hand and a revolver in the other.

He looked at Jack, and pointed the weapon at him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, with sepulchral hollowness.

"Who are you?" asked Jack.

"The owner of claim three hundred and thirty-three," was the answer, and then the strange visitant laughed loudly, as though he had uttered a good joke.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLAIMANT TO THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-THREE.

Jack Chambers was no coward. He could face the music of a rifle as well as anyone of his age in a square stand-up fight. Yet he trembled as his eyes were riveted on the barrel of the heavy caliber revolver which was so plainly pointed at him.

But, though he knew that he was at the mercy of the visitor, he was not going to tamely surrender.

"Who did you say you are?" he asked again.

"The owner of claim three hundred and thirty-three."

"What do you want?"

"My rights."

"Now Mr.—whatever your name is—see here, you say that the claim I and my pards work is yours."

"So it is."

"Well, suppose I say it is not; what then?"

"Don't prove anything."

"Neither does your assertion of claim."

"We admit that on both sides, but the claim is mine and you have got to clear out."

"And if we refuse?"

"I shall make you."

"You seem an educated man," said Jack, talking for the sake of gaining time for his partners to return, "and you must know I shall not give up the claim unless you prove it is yours."

"Did you ever hear of George Galvin?" asked the claimant.

"Yes; but he is dead," answered Jack.

"How do you know?" inquired the man.

"I have heard it."

"Good; and you believe all you hear, so why don't you give up the claim when I say it is mine?"

Jack could not help laughing at the manner in which the tables had been turned upon him; but, all the same, he felt he was in a very unpleasant predicament.

"It happens, this time, that hearsay is right," continued the claimant. "George Galvin is dead, but he bequeathed all his right, title and interest—I am a lawyer—to me."

"Can you prove it?"

"I can."

"Very well; now tell me who is Dick Galvin?"

The claimant's face turned white, his teeth chattered, and his knees knocked together.

Jack saw his advantage, and followed it up by saying:

"Dick Galvin claims the valley, though even he has only a shadowy right——"

"What do you know of Richard Galvin?"

"What do you?"

"He is dead."

"Is that so?" asked Jack, by way of answering.

"Yes."

"How do you know it?"

The claimant's face changed again; instead of pale, it was now a lurid red. His eyes were glazed and looked like burning coals, his tongue kept continually moistening his lips, as if he were consumed by inward fever.

"I saw him die," was the answer, given solemnly and with hesitation.

"You killed him, perhaps," hazarded Jack.

"What if I did? I don't care if I did; yes, I'll tell you more. I did kill him, as I—will—you."

Jack was covered with the revolver and could not move. He saw he had a desperate villain to deal with and had to act cautiously.

"Yes—I—will—kill you," the man hissed, between his teeth.

"You will, eh? Not if I know it, I'll be darned if you do."

A pair of strong arms had encircled the claimant and thrown him to the floor.

'Frisco Bill had entered just at the right moment, and it was a fortunate thing for Jack that the stranger had

moved away from the door, or Bill could not have entered so noiselessly.

"I'll be durned if it ain't Lawyer Simpson," exclaimed 'Frisco Bill, after a closer inspection of the claimant.

"You know him?" asked Jack.

"I should kinder think so. Get up, old pal. Nobody will hurt you here, if you act on the square."

Lawyer Simpson, as 'Frisco Bill called him, moved uneasily on the floor, but was too afraid to rise. He had been nearly stunned by the force with which he was thrown to the floor, and feared he might be treated to a second dose unless he stayed just where he was.

"Get up, I say."

"Who speaks?"

"Look and see."

Simpson crawled a little way further from 'Frisco Bill, raised himself gradually to his knees and then to his feet, all the time clutching his revolvers.

"Put down them shootin' irons," commanded 'Frisco Bill. The man obeyed willingly enough. He looked at Bill, and after a long inspection said:

"Is it Mr. William Huntley?"

"It is; but none of your oily ways, you sneakin' lawyer. Honest men call me plain Bill, or 'Frisco Bill, an' I don't want no mister tacked on to it, at least not from the likes of you."

"Don't be angry, Mr.—I mean Bill."

"Angry, not I; what should vex me? Now tell me what dirty work brings you here?"

"He says he is the owner of claim three hundred and thirty-three, and orders us to get out," said Jack, quickly.

"Oh, that's your game, is it? Then, Lawyer Simpson, you are too late, for Bill Huntley and his pards own the claim——"

"By what title?" asked the lawyer.

"Put down that shootin' iron or I'll be durned if I don't let daylight into you just for fun like."

"Don't speak that way," whined the lawyer.

"I'll give you five minutes to get out of the hollow," said 'Frisco Bill. "Five minutes, mind you; do you hear?"

Lawyer Simpson sneaked out of the door just as he heard Bill say to his young partner:

"He's mad—stark, starin' mad, but at times he's sane an' then he's a good lawyer."

"Mad, am I?" muttered Lawyer Simpson; "mad! well, we'll see, Mr. William Huntley. I fancy my boys'll take the claim from you, and then you'll be very glad to say you didn't mean any harm."

'Frisco Bill closed the door, when he was sure that Simpson had gone, and asked Jack Chambers what had been said.

'Frisco Bill listened intently to the narrative.

He was interested evidently, and when the young miner had finished, Huntley murmured to himself:

"So he killed Dick Galvin, did he? Well, well, perhaps he thinks so, but if I'm not mistaken, Dick Galvin is alive, and not very far away either."

"What were you saying, partner?" Jack asked, as he heard the muttering.

"Nothing much. Only Simpson is mad. How could he get any right to our claim?"

"But if he got it from Galvin, and then killed the owner?"

"If—ay, my boy, that's it exactly. Only don't you see,

it ain't proved that Galvin is dead, an' next thing, we've got possession, an' I intends keeping it, until—I'm driven out."

"Well, to change the subject, what about the warning?"

"That's what we can't make out. But we have set a watch, an' a shotgun'll tell whether the warnin' comes from ghost or human. If the latter, he won't scare for a cent after to-night."

Tom had listened to the conversation in silence. He was evidently inclined to treat the matter more seriously.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Jack.

"Only that madmen are dangerous at times, and this lawyer fellow may be in league with others, who will swoop down and take us unawares."

"If we let 'em; eh, Tom?"

"That's it; forewarned is forearmed, isn't it, Jack?"

"It is, and we won't be caught napping easily. Your advice is good, Tom, and we shall adopt it," Jack asserted, with the authority of joint ownership.

'Frisco Bill felt that the boys were right, and that it would be well to be so prepared that, in case of any trouble, they could hold their own against any claimants to their property.

The remarkable thing about it was that the whole gulch was claimed by Dick Galvin, and that Lawyer Simpson had declared Galvin dead. There was a double mystery to be accounted for and explained.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOWN'S MEETING.

"It's about time we held a town's meetin'," said 'Frisco Bill the next morning as he walked round to see the effect of the painted skeleton on the boys.

"Right yer air."

"Who will call it?"

"Why, yer were fust hyur. So you're the man."

"All serene, pard. 'Frisco Bill ain't no ways bashful. The town's meeting'll take place this afternoon."

"Good!"

"Right yer aire, Bill."

"Bully for you."

Everyone seemed fired with enthusiasm, and with true miner's superstition they believed if only a town was organized and officers appointed, they would be all safe and have a sure title in their claims.

The call for the meeting soon spread, and long before the time appointed every miner had thrown down his tools, and some had even gone so far as to wash their hands and faces in honor of the great event.

The crowd that gathered round the great boulder, which was to act as a rostrum, was a motley one.

The majority were good-hearted, rough fellows, honest and true; but there were some who would not hesitate to shoot a man on the slightest provocation or cut a throat for gain. Like every pioneer camp, all classes were represented. The college-bred youth, who had sought to gain wealth, elbowed against a man who, in his boyhood, had been but a gutter-snipe, educated in crime before he had reached his teens.

Some were married, their wives waiting with anxious hearts and tear-filled eyes hundreds of miles away for the husband who was to return rich beyond compare; oth-

ers again were single, free from all responsibilities and only caring for the gold, that they might some day return to civilization, and have a good time, as they expressed it.

'Frisco Bill blew a whistle, as the signal for silence, and then got on the boulder.

"Citizens! partners all!" he commenced. "I called this hyur meetin' because it's about time that Dead Man's Hollow should have a mayor an' officers. Ain't it so?"

"It is."

"Bully for yer."

"Go ahead, Bill."

When the ejaculations had subsided he continued:

"We never know how soon we may be attacked—what with Injuns an' boglins, an' old Lawyer Simpson——"

"That's so."

"So I guess we ought to have a mayor fust thing."

"Thet's it. A mayor we must hev."

"Then name your choice."

A big, broad-shouldered man, whose shoulders rose higher than 'Frisco Bill's head, got up beside the chairman, and took off his hat.

His hair was long and matted. It looked as if it had been a stranger to a comb for many years. He wore a red flannel shirt, which opened so low on the neck that his great, brawny chest was bare. His face had been well polished with water, but by some accident or mischance he had forgotten to let the cleansing liquid touch his neck.

Raising his hand for silence, he said:

"Boys, yer know me."

"We do."

"You aire sure thet what Long Harry says is so, ain't yer?"

"Right ag'in."

"Then I tell yer, thet ef I was a durned speechifier I could tell yer ye have struck it rich."

"Tell us what we don't know," shouted one, while the others were uneasy to find out at what the giant miner was driving.

"Now, it stan's to sense, don't it, pals, thet havin' a good thing, yer'll want to keep it. An' I tell yer that yer'll hev to fight for it before long."

"Why?"

"Do you know anythin'?"

"Spit it out, Long Harry, an' don't take up all the time."

Long Harry waited good-naturedly for the interrupters to express themselves. Perhaps it was to give him an opportunity to collect his thoughts, or to extract some more juice from the big quid of tobacco which rolled about in his mouth.

He waited patiently, and then, when all was silent, continued:

"Thet air mad lawyer ain't no good. He is in with the reds, as well as with Dusky Sam an' his tribe."

"Do you mean it?"

"I reckon I do. Now, boys, we want a mayor as won't be played with—one who can pull a trigger as good as he can take a swig of whisky; an' so I makes bold to say that 'Frisco Bill is the boy for mayor."

"Bravo!"

"Hi, hi! Hurrah!"

That was the signal for such cheering as had been but seldom heard in Dead Man's Hollow.

Everyone was in favor of the proposition.

It needed no seconder. All were agreed, and William Huntley was chosen mayor.

The new chief executive thanked the men for the compliment they had paid him, and then suggested it would be well to have a town clerk.

"Must he be able to write?" asked one of the miners.

"In course," answered another.

"Then I reckon as how young Tom Dolan would make a good un."

"I guess he'd do."

"Why, boys, he was made for the job."

"All in favor of Tom Dolan," commenced Mayor Huntley; but before he could finish the boys shouted and cheered so loudly that whether there was a dissident or not it was impossible to determine.

Tom blushed like a young girl, and could only stammer out his thanks in a very few words.

'Frisco Bill blew his whistle for silence, and again addressed the crowd.

"We must have ten regulators, an' I move an' perpose thet Long Harry be chief an' hev power to select ten more to help him."

This was heartily agreed to; and after a justice was appointed the meeting broke up.

Long Harry selected his men, and told them their duty. They were to be police and soldiers, to protect the camp and repel invaders.

There was one man who, while he had taken no part in the meeting, was deeply interested. He stood smoking a very short, black pipe, his hands stuck deep in his pockets, and his brow wrinkled with many a frown.

When the meeting was over, he went back to his claim, and sat in front of his shanty, silent and morose.

He kept muttering to himself between the whiffs of his pipe, but not a word did he utter loud enough for any of the miners to hear.

He was a stranger to all. Not one even remembered to have seen him before the day he came into Dead Man's Hollow and staked out his claim.

He had been asked to give his name, and he sulkily answered:

"Call me Ned—my name is Ned Driscoll."

That was all they could get out of him. As to where he came from, or whether he was green or not, they could not find out.

But as he never spoke to any, but worked unceasingly on his claim, no one took any further notice of him.

CHAPTER IX.

NED DRISCOLL.

Ned Driscoll—or plain "Ned," as he had asked to be called—was acting a part. It is true he worked hard on his claim, but it is also true that he did not realize as much wealth as he wanted. Claim 333 was as rich as all the other claims combined.

The boys, with 'Frisco Bill, were turning out five or six hundred dollars a day, and many were envious.

Not that the majority would have dispossessed the three pioneers, because there is considerable honor in a mining camp. But there were a few who wanted gold without

working for it, and these would steep their hands in crime to obtain their desires.

Ned had conceived a plan whereby he could get considerable gold, and in a far easier way than working for it.

But Ned had two personalities. At times he was gentle and kind, even pitying the trout he caught on his hook, and hesitating to shoot a bird on account of the seeming cruelty, but his mood would change and then he could shoot down human beings in cold blood, even priding himself on his unerring aim.

There were the two spirits striving for mastery—the good and the evil. The good prompted him to work on his claim, the evil whispered how much easier it would be to take what others had obtained.

It was the contention of these two spirits which made him so morose and silent after the holding of the town meeting.

That night, after nearly all had wrapped themselves in their blankets and sought repose, Ned cautiously left his shanty, and glided, almost without noise, up the side of the hill and away from the camp.

Long Harry and his regulators had not seen him go, and if they had the chances are they would not have questioned him, for the gulch was not a prison, and no one had any suspicion of traitors within the camp.

But Ned did not know that. His conscience was guilty, and he thought all might read his thoughts.

After nearly an hour's scramble up the hill, over loose stones, and down into the valley, Ned sat down to think.

He was alone.

The very silence almost tempted him to go back and abandon his project.

But the evil conquered, and he sat still. Not for long. His limbs had hardly got rested before he was tapped on the shoulder.

Looking up, he saw the man who had been called Lawyer Simpson.

"So you came?" said Simpson.

"Yes."

"Well?"

Ned was silent, his tongue seemed glued to his mouth.

"What did you want?" asked the lawyer.

"You say you own 333?"

"What of it?"

"You can't get it."

"How's that?"

"The boys have held a town's meeting and elected 'Frisco Bill mayor."

"Is that all?"

"No, it is not all. Long Harry is chief of the regulators."

"Long Harry?"

"Yes."

"That's bad."

"Of course it is, but—do you want claim 333?"

"I want it, and will have it."

"I can help you."

"How?"

"The claim is full of the purest gold I ever saw. I tell you, those boys are just raking in the shiny. It's a regular bonanza."

"I know it; but how will that help?"

"Give me half, if I get the claim?"

"Half? That's too much."

"All right; I'll go back."

"Stop! I'll give you a third share——"

"No, no! Half or nothing."

The mad lawyer walked up and down uneasily. He wanted the claim, but not at such a price.

He stopped, looked at Ned, on whom the moon's rays were falling, and a chill passed through his frame.

"Yes, I will do it," muttered the lawyer; "of course he can have half, until he dies."

The mad lawyer laughed, but even his merriment seemed almost like the echo of a crime.

"Well?" asked Ned.

"I agree, but the terms are high, seeing that I've got the title to the whole claim."

"And it's worthless without me."

"What do you propose?"

"How many of Dusky Sam's men can you get?"

"Thirty or so."

"When?"

"In a week."

"Good. This is Wednesday, let's say this day week."

"I'll be ready. What are we to do?"

"Have your men here, and I'll give you instructions."

"That won't do. I want to know now."

"I'll tell you. I can let you and Dusky Sam's men right into the camp when all are asleep, and you can fight for it."

"I could do that without your aid."

"No, you couldn't."

"Because I know you, Lawyer Simpson. I know you killed Jack Gregory and took his gold; then you took the widow of Jackson—Slimy Jackson, as we called him—and threw her down the gorge, and when that didn't kill her, you rolled a great stone on top of her, and crushed out her life——"

"Who are you?"

Ned did not notice the question, but went on:

"You made yourself a pard of Dick Galvin, and when you found out his wealth, you killed him as well, but he swore he'd haunt you to the end of your days."

"Great powers! he's done it, he's done it," moaned the lawyer.

"You came back here, and what did you see?"

"His ghost."

"Of course you did, and more than once; but the ghost has gone, and I can get you the claim, or if you don't like that, I can give you a few feet of rope."

As Ned uttered the last words, he made a gesture significant of hanging.

"Who are you?" asked the lawyer.

"Your Nemesis or friend, whichever you like."

"It shall be as you say," answered the lawyer.

"Good. Now, don't fail me next Wednesday, and we'll be as rich as kings easily."

"I'll be here."

"With thirty men?"

"I'll have forty."

"Good."

"Let them be a choice pick."

"The best of their kind."

"That's right. There'll be enough for all."

The conspirators separated, the lawyer going back through the valley and Ned climbing the hill just above the camp.

He was tired and weary; several times he had to rest.

Once he had begun to doze, for nature was exhausted.

He suddenly leaped to his feet and exclaimed:

"What's that?"

There was no answer, and Ned sat down again, but feeling nervous and timid.

"Ned!"

The word was uttered in a sepulchral tone, and Ned Driscoll shivered like an aspen leaf as he heard his name sound like a death knell.

"Ned!"

"Who calls?" he at last summoned up courage enough to ask.

There was no answer. He looked in every direction. The moon cast some strange shadows on the ground, but nothing human could he see. His face was now wet with perspiration, his hair seemed to stand on end, and cold water might be passing down his spinal column, so strange did he feel.

He tried to run, but stumbled and fell.

"Ned!"

"It is not fancy," he exclaimed. "Who in thunder calls me?"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Ned Driscoll arose to his feet and found himself confronted by a gaunt-looking man.

"Look at me," said the stranger.

Ned shook and trembled so that he could scarcely raise his eyes.

"Do you know me?"

"No," stammered poor Ned.

"Did you ever hear of Dick Galvin?"

"Ye-es."

"I am he!"

"Oh, saints and angels!" exclaimed Ned, as he heard the confession.

"Yes, I am Dick Galvin."

"But he is dead——"

"Did I say I wasn't dead?"

Ned was bewildered. He had never really believed in ghosts, but now he told himself that he was really in the presence of one.

The man or specter, human being or ghoul, whichever it might be, did not wait for any reply, but went on:

"Who was that man you met?"

"Lawyer Simpson."

"He shall die."

"Oh!"

"You are planning the murder of those on claim 333?"

"Not murder——"

"Yes, it is."

"No, only——"

"I know all. That fellow Simpson says he owns it, but he doesn't. I do, and you have to answer to me. Touch either of the boys on 333 and both you and Simpson shall hang from the same rope. I have said it. Go. But take care, or you'll not live until next Wednesday."

How Ned Driscoll got home to his claim again, he never could tell.

But when morning came, it was reported through the gulch that Silent Ned—as they called him—was right down sick, and was queer in his head.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU COWARDS! STAND BACK!"

Everything went on with regularity at the camp, and no incident broke the calm serenity of the valley until the Saturday night following the conversation between Silent Ned and Lawyer Simpson.

The gold panned out well, and already speculators were wanting to buy the claim 333, but the partners knew that they had got a good thing, and would not sell.

On the Saturday over a hundred additional miners found their way to Dead Man's Hollow, and staked out their claims.

Two of them were accompanied by their wives, and one had several children.

The eldest child was a girl of about sixteen. She was of that wild style of beauty which is so thrillingly captivating.

She had no city airs about her, yet was ladylike in every movement.

Her dress was coarse and far from being in the latest fashion, and her hair hung wildly down her back.

The presence of women in the camp was a great event, and 'Frisco Bill—as mayor—thought the occasion of such importance that he called a town's meeting, and got the boys to arrange for a public welcome that night.

Everybody was heartily in accord with the sentiment, and faces were washed, clothes brushed and shaken, and some even sported clean shirts for the occasion.

Speeches of welcome were made by 'Frisco Bill, Long Harry and others. Songs were sung, and when every kind of entertainment was exhausted, it was remembered that Jack Chambers had a small flute.

He had to produce it, and while he played, an impromptu dance was arranged.

As female partners were scarce, men danced with each other, and a night of hearty enjoyment was spent.

Our young heroes were entranced by the beauty of the young girl, who was the belle of the party.

Both Jack and Tom felt that life would be easier if an occasional smile from her rewarded their efforts.

She was entirely unconscious of the excitement she had caused, and had put all the homage down to a desire on the part of the old settlers to be hospitable.

Once Jack got a chance to speak to her.

"My name is John Chambers—all call me Jack," he said, by way of introduction.

"And mine is Bessie Glyndon."

"What a nice name!"

"Do you think so?" she asked, with pleasant voice.

"Indeed I do. Where do you come from?"

She laughed, and roguishly replied by pointing to her father's claim, and saying:

"Over there."

"I was impertinent," said Jack; "but I meant no wrong."

"I know it, and I only teased you. I am a wild mountain girl—never been to a large city, but grew up near mines until I came here."

"I'm so glad."

"What! glad that I have never been to a city?"

"I didn't mean that; I meant I was glad you came here, but I am also pleased you are not spoiled by city life."

"Bessie!"

"Yes, father," she answered, and then, putting her hand in Jack's, she bade him good-by, and rejoined her father.

Jack didn't sleep that night. Do what he could, the image of Bessie would present itself to his gaze.

His susceptible nature was at once *en rapport* with the wild young beauty, and he thought of her while awake and dreamed about her in the little sleep he got.

There were sounds of carousing all night in the camp. Some who had a plentiful supply of spirits had clubbed together and played cards, drank and smoked all night.

It was a little past six in the morning when Jack turned out of his shanty to get a whiff of the purer morning air.

It was Sunday, and although most of the miners worked that day as well as the others, the owners of claim 333 rested.

Jack wandered through the valley right to the extreme end, and then slowly returned.

He met several miners who had just left the cards and whisky, and saw that Sunday to them would be a day in which to sleep off the effect of the bad spirits they had drank.

He had reached a little stream which crossed the gulch, and at times flowed pretty briskly.

On the other side he heard voices, from behind the rocks, as though of men quarreling.

It was no business of his, and his greatest desire was to keep away.

But just then he fancied he heard a girl's voice.

Leaping the stream and rushing in the direction of the voices, he saw four drunken miners standing in front of pretty Bessie Glyndon.

She was trembling and crying.

"Where's the harm in a kiss, pretty one?" said one of the wretches.

"I'll—hic—have a—hic—kiss. I'll be durned—hic—if I won't," said another, with revolver in hand, as he stepped to the trembling girl and encircled her in his arms.

Jack leaped forward, took the man by the collar and flung him to the ground.

Planting himself in front of Bessie, he drew his revolver and shouted:

"Stand back, you cowards! stand back!"

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS PROTECTOR.

"Stand back, you cowards!" shouted Jack, almost hysterically, for he knew he was nearly powerless in the hands of four drunken ruffians.

"Let the gal alone, can't yer," said Black Slingsby, as he moved a step nearer our young hero.

"Save me! oh, save me!" pleaded pretty Bessie Glyndon, as she grasped Jack's arm.

"Trust me, Miss Glyndon; but you must leave my arm free," he whispered, hurriedly.

"Now, then, young un; what aire you puttin' yer nose inter my business for, eh? Answer me that," shouted another of the infuriated men, as he shook his fist in Jack's face.

Chambers had kept his revolver ready for instant use, and he found it a most effective argument.

"Touch the lady——" commenced the young miner, but an uproarious laugh stopped him.

"Lady! He calls that gal a lady; did yer hear?"

"Touch this girl—if you like that better—and I'll shoot you like a dog."

Jack kept his teeth close together, to prevent them chattering; for he was afraid the four big, burly fellows would rush upon him simultaneously, and easily overpower him and capture the girl.

"Hark yer, he'd shoot," said the one who was known as Black Slingsby.

"He's a plucky un, ain't he?"

"I guess, though, he'd rayther have a whole skin an' let the gal go, than see her skud away with us, as he lay toes upward."

It was a long speech for Black Slingsby to make, but made all the longer by the fact that the speaker paused between each word. There was a deadly meaning in the language, which had its due weight on our hero.

Bessie cried and shivered with fear, and as she crouched behind her protector, she whispered:

"Kill me, oh, kill me, sir, rather than I should fall into their hands."

"Trust to me, Bessie," he answered, using her given name for the first time.

The four miners had become somewhat sobered, and, therefore, the more dangerous.

The devil in their natures was aroused; each man became a perfect fury.

Without fear of Heaven or care for man, they thought nothing of human life.

Instinctively, and as readily as if the word of command had been given, each man whipped out his revolver and leveled it at Jack.

Black Slingsby became the spokesman, and with a forced calmness said:

"We don't want to hurt yer. The gal is our game, we ain't goin' to hurt her, ayther, aire we, boys?"

"No."

"Not exactly."

"Then what do you want?" asked Jack.

"Leave the gal to us; we'll take her to her fayther's home, won't we, boys?"

"Rather."

"Well, I should say so."

"If I refuse to leave Miss Glyndon?"

"Then we'll make yer."

"Not while I'm alive."

"Oh, we ain't pertic'lar, aire we?"

"Not much."

"Now, then, young un, stand aside."

"I will not."

Jack's voice rang out as clear as a bugle call on the morning air, and was so emphatic that the men involuntarily recoiled, as if he had fired a pistol shot at them.

There was a pause for a brief space of time, and then Black Slingsby, looking blacker than his name implied, answered:

"Then I'll be durned if we don't make yer."

"The first man who attempts to lay a hand on Miss Glyndon dies."

"Ha! ha! ha! hark at the gossoon," ejaculated Red O'Brien.

"I mean it."

Black Slingsby looked at our hero as if measuring chances. There was the boy's revolver facing him, and he could see that Jack Chambers was possessed of cool nerves.

"What do yer say, boys?" he asked, almost hesitatingly, for he began to wonder whether the game was worth the candle.

"Do yez want to funk entoirely?" exclaimed Red O'Brien with a sneer.

"Not by a long chalk; I'll be durned if I do. Come on!"

The four men sprang forward, but as they did so, a sharp crack from Jack's pistol mingled with Bessie Glyndon's hysterical shriek. Before he could fire a second time, he found himself grasped round the waist and his hands pinioned by his side.

"Run, Miss Glyndon, run!" he cried out to the half-maddened girl.

"I will not leave you," she said, sobbingly.

"Go," he cried. But he could say no more. A heavy blow on the head made him feel dizzy and faint.

Myriads of stars floated before his eyes, and he felt his knees giving way under him. Even then he could not resist a speculation as to the intention of his assailants. Why did they bother with him, seeing that all they professed to want was the possession of the girl.

What was still stranger was that Bessie had changed her mind, and was running almost with the speed of a deer.

Not a man attempted to follow her.

The fact was that the miners had sobered considerably, and felt that if any harm befell the girl, Judge Lynch would settle with them, with a short shrift and a long rope.

Their object now was to frighten Jack Chambers, so that he would refuse to say a word about their drunken escapade.

He was obdurate, and boldly declared that as soon as he reached the camp, he would inform 'Frisco Bill of all that had occurred.

"You'll peach on us, eh?"

"I shall tell all I know."

Another blow almost bereft him of his senses, but he fought against the faintness, and clinched his teeth together, determined to defy them to the last.

He knew that in half an hour Bessie would return with her father and others to his assistance.

But half an hour was a long time to wait.

His senses were in a whirl of bewilderment.

He heard Black Slingsby propose that their prisoner should be tied to a tree and made a target of.

"I tell yez," said Red O'Brien, "it'll be a quick drop for some of us if yez do."

"Aire yer afraid of the drop?"

"No. But I'm inclined to think that the stopping at the end of the drop will be mighty unpleasant."

"Yer a lot of fools."

"What will we gain?"

"If the chap goes back, he'll peach on the hull of us, and then it'll be a case of lynch."

Black Slingsby held the other three in his hand. His stronger will ruled them.

Acting on his advice, they quickly improvised a rope out of their belts, and had the boy miner lashed to a tree.

"Now, then, boys, twenty paces, an' O'Brien will fire first."

The renegade Irishman stepped back twenty paces and raised his revolver.

A puff of smoke was seen and a sharp crack heard.

But Jack Chambers was unhurt.

The shot had not reached him, neither was it intended it should, but on the green grass lay the body of Red O'Brien as dead as any miner whose bones were bleaching in Dead Man's Hollow.

The three companions looked at each other.

Had O'Brien shot himself? It did not seem likely, but it was a mystery, anyway.

Custer Dick, a wild, devil-may-care fellow, laughed at what he called the accident, and took his place to fire at the boy.

He slowly raised his revolver, but before he could even take a snapshot the weapon fell from his hand.

He reeled a moment, gave a sudden jump in the air, and fell dead.

The other two took to their heels and ran with the speed of a mad dog.

The sight had been too much for Jack.

He expected every moment to be his last. He closed his eyes, and felt as though he would faint.

Gliding down the rocks, his strange protector approached him. Cautiously the man removed the belts and gave Jack his liberty.

The boy lay down at full length utterly prostrated, but his dim senses seemed to recognize the fact that some one was whispering in his ear, and he even thought he heard a voice say:

"Dick Galvin will always protect you."

He knew no more until half an hour later, when he found himself being carried on a rude litter back to the camp.

He opened his eyes and saw Bessie Glyndon on one side of him, and 'Frisco Bill, walking in front, as became his high office.

With a sigh of relief, he leaned back, and sank into a most delicious state of unconsciousness.

The dreams which floated through his brain were strange mixtures.

Visions of a sweet, fair girl were mingled with the faces of angry, furious and drunken miners, and pistol shots chased away the soft cadence of Bessie Glyndon's voice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VOICE OF MERCY.

The Sunday was by no means a quiet day in Dead Man's Hollow.

But that one day, when Jack Chambers was carried into the gulch by his comrades, bade fair to be the noisiest ever witnessed in a mining camp.

Bessie Glyndon had told a very strange tale. In her excitement, when she reached her father's shanty, she represented our young hero as braving a score of desperate ruffians.

Chambers became the hero of the hour, and when he reached the camp the miners all gathered round the litter to look upon his face.

The mayor, with becoming dignity, announced that a town's meeting was necessary to have the mystery explained.

Jack was not seriously hurt, and he was ready to give his evidence at any time.

It was an imposing scene.

No court of law ever presented a grander picture of human justice than met the gaze of the onlookers in that gulch that Sunday afternoon.

Rough, uneducated, illiterate men for the most part, yet nearly all actuated with but one desire—to punish the scoundrels who had so wantonly attacked the young girl.

Black Slingsby and his pal had been placed under arrest, and were seated on a big boulder, securely pinioned and bound.

They muttered curses loud and deep on all concerned, and after repeated cautions, Long Harry, as chief of the regulators, ordered them to be gagged.

The fellows foamed at the mouth, and tried to bite like wild beasts, but they were powerless to do harm.

'Frisco Bill rose to the full dignity of his position, and stood on a rock, with his town clerk, Tom Dolan, on one side, and the justice of the peace on the other.

"Silence, pards," he said. "There isn't any time for tom-foolin' about this business. You will hear what my young pard, Jack Chambers, has to say, and then we'll listen to the gal, who is as clear-headed as many men. Then, pards, when they've got through with their say, these durned skunks shall say what they please. Am I right?"

"That's the way."

"Bravo, Bill!"

"Let's hear the young un."

Chambers suffered from a terrible headache, caused by the blows he had received, and could only speak in a voice little louder than a whisper.

He told the story of his adventure, and caused considerable surprise when he said he did not fire the shots which had killed the two men.

Bessie corroborated the story told by her rescuer, and spoke of the great bravery he had shown. She was sure that Black Slingsby and his pal were the men who had assaulted her.

The gag was removed from Slingsby's mouth, and he was asked to give his version.

He admitted everything. His only excuse was that he was drunk.

"The young un didn't fire, that I'll sw'ar!" said Slingsby, emphatically. "I saw the boys fall, and I know that a spook fired at 'em!"

"A spook!" shouted several in astonishment, while others sneered at the assertion.

"You can laugh, but I tell yer a spook done it, an' I saw his face."

"Whose face?" asked 'Frisco Bill.

"The one what fired. The airth has covered his bones long enough."

"Who was it?"

"Dick Galvin," answered Slingsby, but as he uttered the word his knees shook together, and his face was ashy pale.

"Did you know Dick?" asked 'Frisco Bill.

"Know him. I reckon I did. I worked in this ere gulch side by side with him."

"You mean George Galvin."

"I mean Dick, an' don't yer forget it."

Here was a new mystery. Jack had told 'Frisco Bill and Tom Dolan of the words he fancied he heard in his fainting sleep, and it coincided with the testimony of Slingsby.

There was no more evidence to be taken.

Slingsby had admitted his guilt, and there was no doubt that Jack Chambers had been fully justified in the course he had taken.

Then came the question of punishment.

"What say you, boys?" asked 'Frisco Bill.

"Hang 'em!" said Long Harry.

"Ay, one at each end of a long rope," said another.

"That's just what I was about to observe," remarked 'Frisco Bill, calmly, "an' I guess Long Harry'll do the job as clean an' neat as anyone."

The wretches squirmed considerably as they learned their fate. They were cowards, and not even bravado came to their rescue.

As Long Harry was about to lead the condemned away a man pushed through the crowd and whispered in Mayor Huntley's ear.

"Hold on, Harry," he shouted. "New evidence."

Every miner present wondered what the mayor meant, but when Bessie Glyndon was lifted on the rock, and they saw her face was crimson they were as silent as the dead.

"Good people," she commenced, "these men," pointing to the condemned, "were drunk and didn't know what they were doing. For my sake, forgive them this time."

Her hair hung down her back, and as she spoke it blew about her head and face, forming almost a veil for her flaming cheeks and tear-wet eyes.

She was a veritable picture as she stood there braving the gaze of that rough crowd, and pleading for mercy for those who had attempted to so cruelly wrong her.

Bareheaded and barefooted, she stood waiting for an answer to her prayers.

"Will you forgive them?" she said, again.

A loud cry went up from every throat. It sounded like but one voice, a voice rivaling the thunder in its roar.

"No!"

It sounded like a death knell to the prisoners, and the hills answered back with a rolling echo, each sound growing fainter until from the loud thunder it died away to the murmur of a zephyr breeze.

But the faint whisper was equally as emphatic as the loud roar.

All were unanimous.

"No!"

That was the verdict. The men must die. Bessie's cheeks were wet with a flood of tears which had fallen from her eyes. She turned to 'Frisco Bill, and between her sobs said:

"You—will—save—them—won't—you?"

Then the mayor spoke up, and even his voice was husky with emotion.

"Can't do it, little missie," he said; and then turning to the men, he continued: "Boys, pards, all! If we save these—these darned skunks, which of us is safe? You that have daughters, an' you that have wives, think of it. If we save these," and Bill pointed to the men with his foot, "others will think we aire soft-hearted and darsen't do right."

"That's so," said one.

"Hang 'em," shouted another.

Jack Chambers rose quietly by the side of Bessie.

His head was bandaged still, and his eyes had lost their luster.

He motioned for silence.

"Boys, I ask you, as did this lady, to save these men."

"Can't."

"Darsen't!"

"Listen to me. Two of their pals are dead. Killed, says Black Slingsby, by the ghost of Richard Galvin. Now, haven't they suffered enough? The spook will watch them, and can't we leave them to our protector, who, on more than one occasion, has fired so mysteriously from the rocks and saved us."

Chambers would have made a longer speech, but he was weak and exhausted.

Even as it was, he reeled like one drunk, and would have fallen, had not Bessie's father caught him in his arms.

What could be done?

The parties principally concerned pleaded for forgiveness.

'Frisco Bill again asked for a vote, and Long Harry proposed it should be left to the mayor.

Huntley was in a dilemma now, for both Bessie and Jack were pleading for forgiveness, and his word would end two lives, or send them away, free to carry on their evil ways.

He hesitated, and was about to order the execution, but he caught sight of Bessie's eyes, and saw there such a look, that, as he said afterward, it took all the courage out of him.

That saved the men's lives.

Turning to Long Harry, he gave an order for the cords to be cut and the gags removed.

"Go!" he said. "Leave the gulch at once, and never attempt to enter it."

Bessie's father jumped on the rock, and, with his rifle firmly gripped in his hand, shouted:

"Go, an' if ever I get within shootin' range, I'll make yer turn up your toes quicker'n a flash. Go!"

It did not take long for the scoundrels to get out of sight.

Many felt that a great mistake had been made, but all were glad that the Hollow had escaped the scene of a double execution.

The owners of claim 333 became more popular than ever, and young Chambers, especially, was the hero of the hour.

A few of the most prominent miners got together and agreed to stake out a claim, to be called "the Bessie."

This was to be worked by the miners in turn, and the proceeds given to gentle, kind-hearted Bessie Glyndon, in honor of her brave action and merciful pleading.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGE WARNING.

Mayor Huntley stood before the door of his shanty on the Wednesday morning following the scene narrated in the last chapter.

Something troubled him. He occasionally pushed up his broad-brimmed hat and scratched his head.

That was indubitable evidence that his brain was puzzled about something more than the amount of gold dust he had got stored away in a safe place.

"Tom," he shouted, as he saw his young partner washing his face in a tub of water, a little distance away.

"Hello, pard! how goes it this morning?" responded Tom, heartily.

"I don't know. Come here; or wait, I'll come to you."

"What is it, Bill?"

"I'm puzzled."

"So I see. I knew you had your considering cap on when I saw you."

Tom had, after much splashing of water and spluttering, succeeded in getting his face and neck as clean as he desired, and was rubbing himself with a coarse towel until his cheeks shone like a ripe tomato.

"Are you ready for a surprise, Mr. Town Clerk?"

"Yes, Mayor Huntley."

"Then read that."

Bill handed a scrap of paper to Dolan, and then folded his arms, while Tom read the writing inscribed on the mysterious paper. 'Frisco Bill watched Tom eagerly.

Tom read and reread the writing. He, too, was puzzled.

"What does it mean?"

"That is what I asked you," Bill remarked.

"Here is Jack; he can tell, perhaps, better than I can."

Chambers came out of the hut and at once crossed to where his partners were in close conversation.

"Come here, Jack; what do you make of this?"

Chambers read the paper slowly.

"Where did you get it?"

"It was stuck under the door of my shanty," answered Bill.

"Who by?"

"That's more'n I can tell."

"I don't know what to make of it. Long Harry is pretty shrewd, let us call him."

Tom did not wait until permission was given, but was off like a shot, and soon reappeared with the chief of the regulators.

Long Harry looked puzzled when he saw the serious faces of his friends.

"How goes it, pards?" he asked, good-humoredly.

"What do you make out of this paper, which I found in my shanty when I woke?"

"Read it, and I'll tell yer."

Jack took the paper and read as follows:

"TO MAYOR 'FRISCO BILL: The man in Dead Man's Hollow who sleeps on Wednesday night deserves to die. Dogs seldom bite those who put on a bold front. A word is enough."

"Waal, I'll be durned!" exclaimed Long Harry, when he heard the paper read.

"Who writ it?" asked Miner Glyndon, who had strolled up as young Chambers commenced to read.

"He was no tenderfoot," said Harry.

"An' well eddicated," added Glyndon.

"Never mind that," said Huntley, "there's the paper. What does it mean?"

"A warnin'!"

"Of course; but what have we to fear?"

"Thet's what I'd like to know."

"Waal, boys, there's no harm in bein' ready, an' my advice is, just get yer shootin' irons ready, an' sleep with one eye open to-night."

Long Harry twisted and twirled a quid about in his mouth all the time he was talking, but that did not prevent his friends from hearing the good advice he gave.

"We must hev a meetin'."

"Tarnation take the fellows," muttered Ned Driscoll, who had overheard the conversation, "the whole thing is blown higher'n a kite."

The traitor turned away, feeling far from well.

"Who could have warned them?" he asked himself many times. "Surely, Lawyer Simpson ain't done it?"

The guilty miner saw a traitor in every partner, and Ned was almost ready to believe that Simpson was at the bottom of it all.

One thing was certain, the lawyer must be seen and Dusky Sam's men kept away.

But how was it to be done?

This puzzled Ned, for he knew he had a bad name, and was suspected of being a villain.

If he left the camp, he might be followed, and if he did not, then Dusky Sam would pounce down upon the miners, be repulsed and most likely betray both Simpson and Ned Driscoll.

It was a hard nut to crack, and Ned's brain was too sluggish to do it in any way satisfactorily.

The day wore away slowly. Every man went to work at his claim as if nothing was expected.

The sand was washed, and the gold taken out; many sang songs of joy at their good luck, while others, not quite so successful, envied their more fortunate brothers.

Jack Chambers was working on the "Bessie" claim for two hours—his share of the willing work.

Something caused him to stop. He went on his knees, looked straight into the hole he had been digging; the perspiration poured from him, and he could scarcely see for the blinding sweat.

"Bill!" he shouted.

"Tom!"

"What is it?" asked the latter, who was a hundred yards away.

"Come here, both of you."

'Frisco Bill drew his shirt sleeve across his face, leaving a lighter space where it had crossed, and with Tom Dolan walked across to the "Bessie."

Jack was sitting on a stone, as red as a peony, and as excited as a nervous girl.

"What's in the wind, Jack?"

"Look at that," and the young miner pointed to a great chunk of dirty-looking stone.

"Waal?"

"It's all gold."

"You don't say so?"

"Fact!"

"Get out!"

"I tell you it is. See here."

Jack lifted the great chunk and rubbed his hand over its surface. It was a monster gold nugget.

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed 'Frisco Bill.

"What's it worth?" asked practical Tom.

"Worth, do you say? Why, man alive, it's worth ten thousand dollars, if it's worth a red."

The noise had attracted a couple of score of miners, and the nugget was handed round for each to inspect.

"B'gosh!" shouted one, "but I'll marry Bessie right away."

What made Jack Chambers become so red as the man uttered the speech?

Surely, he could not be jealous. The miner, perhaps, was only joking; but Jack felt it might be serious.

Scampering like a playful lamb, pretty Bessie Glyndon jumped from stone to stone, her hair flying wildly in the breeze, and her coarse clothing catching in the occasional brush and sharp edges of rock, much to its detriment.

"Miss Glyndon," said Jack; but whether he intended saying anything more or not, he was effectually stopped by Bessie's hand being pressed over his mouth as she remarked, coldly:

"Is dead. The one who calls me anything but Bessie—mind you, plain Bessie——"

"But you ain't plain; you're pretty," interjected Tom.

Bessie colored a little deeper, and continued:

"Is no friend of mine. Now, then, Jack, what is it?"

"This," pointing to the nugget.

"What is it?"

"Gold—all gold."

"Ay, me lass, an' worth ten thousand dollars."

"Whose is it?"

"Yours, Bessie. It was found here on your claim."

"Mine—all mine?" she exclaimed, with eyes wide open.

"Yes, all yours."

"To do as I like with."

"Of course."

"Then I give it all to Jack, here, the brave boy who defended me when I thought I hadn't a friend."

"No, no, Bessie, I can't take it."

"But you must."

"No, I will not."

"Take it, boy, and her, too, if you like."

It was Bessie's father who spoke, and its effect was to make both Bessie and Jack feel hot and uncomfortable.

"Miner Glyndon," said our hero, calmly, "I cannot and will not take that nugget. Call it 'The Bessie,' and let it be her very own."

There was a loud cheer when Jack so expressed himself, and Bessie was compelled to take the valuable nugget to her father's hut.

"Where did 'oo get dat stone?" asked Bessie's little brother, when she got home.

"It's all gold," said the girl, proudly.

"Did 'oo div him a tiss for it?" asked the youngster again.

Bessie stooped down and kissed her little brother, and whispered in his ear:

"I gave him my heart instead of a kiss."

The fame and good fortune of the Bessie claim spread through the gulch, and every miner felt that the next stroke of his pick would give him as great a bonanza.

Darkness came at last, and Ned had been unable to keep his appointment with Lawyer Simpson.

The rascal began to shiver and quake with fear.

He knew that Dusky Sam would not hesitate to invade the gulch and fight for its wealth.

It was possible that the miners would be well prepared, but even if successful, Ned felt his day was over, for his villainy would be surely exposed.

'Frisco Bill and Long Harry had prepared the miners for the expected attack.

At nightfall the women and children were all sheltered in 'Frisco Bill's shanty, it being the strongest, and at the same time furthest removed from the likeliest point of attack.

The miners were arranged into three companies, one under the command of Jack Chambers to defend the part of the valley occupied by claim 333. Another under Miner Glyndon was to defend the center, including a narrow pass through the rocks, while Tom Dolan was at the head of the eastern side of the gulch, which was the most likely point of attack.

Mayor Bill Huntley and Long Harry were to be the generals of the whole, and to superintend all proceedings.

The men were to occupy the shanties and tents, as if nothing was expected to spoil the serenity, and ruffle the calmness of the night.

The signal was agreed upon, and all waited with almost breathless suspense the revealing of the mystery.

"Had they been fooled?" Tom asked himself many a time, as the weary hours of the night went by and not a sign of any intruder was manifest.

Ned Driscoll was so uneasy in his mind, that many a time he raised his pistol, thinking to put an end to his misery, but in each case his courage oozed away.

Three o'clock had passed, and a noise of galloping horses could be heard.

'Frisco Bill and Long Harry went forward to the entrance of the Hollow, and awaited the approach of friends or foes.

They had not long to wait.

In a few minutes a noted desperado, possessing the savage ferocity of the Sioux Indian, derived from his mother, who was a member of that tribe, and the criminal recklessness of a white father who expiated his crimes on the gallows, rode forward.

He halted as he saw 'Frisco Bill and Long Harry.

"What do you want?" asked Mayor Huntley.

"The mayor of these hyar diggin's."

"I'm the mayor."

"Glad to see yer."

"Thanks; now, what do you want?"

"Do yer know me?"

"You are called Dusky Sam."

"Right you aire, an' yer know as how I allus says what I mean."

"Well, again I ask you, what do you want?"

"You an' all yer pals to clear out of these hyar diggin's."

"And if we refuse?"

"Dusky Sam'll make yer, that's all."

"Better try it, you scoundrel. You're in it, are you?" exclaimed Bill, as he saw Lawyer Simpson ride up to Dusky Sam.

"Will yer git out an' save yer darned lives?" again asked Dusky Sam.

"No, no, no!" shouted Bill.

"Come on, boys," yelled Dusky Sam, "we'll soon cl'ar these hyar diggin's."

Instantly fifty or sixty savage-looking desperadoes,

many of them half-breeds, some pure Indians, galloped into the hollow.

But no sooner had they entered than Tom Dolan gave the word of command, and a score of rifles sent out a warm but unpleasant welcome to the invaders.

"At 'em, boys," yelled Dusky Sam, like a very demon.

"Give them no quarter, men. Fight for your homes and your rights," shouted Tom Dolan, emerging from a tent and calling on a score of well-armed miners to follow him to victory or to death.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE OF DEAD MAN'S HOLLOW.

The miners of Dead Man's Hollow were not going to have their claims taken from them without a struggle.

When Tom Dolan uttered his word of command, and the soul-stirring shout "Victory or death!" rang out on the clear air, and echoed among the hills, every nerve in each miner's body thrilled with excitement.

As the war horse rears its head and shows its pride when the bugle sounds "the charge," so did those men straighten themselves, and each one began to feel that the safety of the camp depended on his individual exertion.

The rifles of the miners belched forth their fiery contents.

The half-breeds and Indians dashed forward, but it was to their doom.

Scarcely had they gone twenty paces before another volley was fired right into their very faces.

Another and still another volley was fired.

Dusky Sam saw that by some means the miners had been warned.

Who could have done it?

Was it the mad lawyer? Not likely, for he had most to gain.

Consternation pervaded the ranks of the half-breeds.

But they rallied, and made a spurt forward, only to be met with another fiery welcome.

Over a dozen of Dusky Sam's men lay dead upon the battlefield.

Then Tom gave the command, and every man clubbed his weapon and rushed upon the foe.

Swinging his long rifle in his nervous hands, Tom dealt lightning-like blows in every direction.

But though the miners had dealt terrible execution among the half-breeds, yet the loss to the gallant defenders had been heavy.

A reinforcement was near at hand to aid Dusky Sam.

A score of desperate characters had been gathered together by Lawyer Simpson, and, at a most critical time for the half-breeds, they dashed into the Hollow.

Tom saw that he was being too hard pressed, and that there was but small hope for the remnant of his band, yet he was too proud to call for assistance.

But 'Frisco Bill, finding that Tom Dolan was having all the fighting to do, could not resist the temptation to join in, and with a wild whoop, which would have been a credit to a Sioux Indian, he dashed forward with forty men at his back to take a hand in the fun.

"Hold up thar, Tom; we are coming!" shouted Bill.

Tom was grateful, and rallied his men.

"We are saved, boys!" he said; "for 'Frisco Bill is with us."

The very name was inspiring, for many had heard of the redoubtable deeds of the old miner, and believed he bore not only a charmed life, but was invincible as a fighter.

With a revolver in each hand, Bill dashed forward at the head of his contingent, and firing right and left spread dismay and consternation in the ranks of the half-breeds.

The followers of Dusky Sam tried hard to meet the wild onset, but all in vain.

Never was rout more sudden, more unexpected, more complete.

While the fighting was going on between Dusky Sam and our brave young hero, Tom, his partner and friend, Jack, had to meet a difficulty as great.

Fortunately, Jack was fully alive to the emergency, and his few chosen men, well disciplined by Long Harry, were ready for any fighting from whatever quarter it might come.

"I reckon thet the varmints'll try to take us unawares," said Long Harry, as he cautioned Jack to be on the lookout for surprises.

All was quiet for some time, and Jack began to feel that his end of the valley was to be saved a scene of bloodshed.

"Needn't look for 'em thet way," said Charley Reynolds, as he saw Jack Chambers watching the entrance to the valley.

"How then?"

"'Pears to me they'll creep along like cats arter mice."

It was not long before it was found that Charley Reynolds was a true reader of character.

Dodging from rock to rock, skulking behind trees and bushes, a number of men were discovered winding their way gradually down to the camp.

Charley Reynolds had advised that the defenders should remain perfectly still until the foe was right upon them.

When the invaders were within sure range, Jack whispered an order to fire.

Several of the half-breeds were seen to fall, but the others rushed forward, intending to carry everything by assault.

In this they were mistaken, for every rock seemed to hide a well-armed miner, and as each man leaped to his feet he fired a sure-aimed shot.

One big fellow, who, although he had white blood in his veins, was dressed like a Crow Indian, had pushed forward and seized Jack round the throat.

"Quit yer hold, ye rapscaillon!" shouted Charley Reynolds, as he pushed his way through the surging crowd to assist Jack against the Crow.

The man's fingers were tightening round our hero's throat, and his life was only worth a few minutes' purchase.

Reynolds coolly placed the muzzle of his revolver against the redskin's cheek, and the next instant a sickening lot of blood and brains were spattered over everything near by.

Each miner proved himself a hero, and when the dead and dying were falling like leaves in an autumn wind, the cheers of the miners made themselves heard by their copartners at the other end of the valley.

It was a hard fight, but on the part of the miners in Dead Man's Hollow, was well contested and bravely won. Jack soon recovered from the effect of the choking and was otherwise unhurt.

When the mists had cleared away and all were able to count the cost of the battle, it was found that the miners had lost five by death, and three others were wounded fatally.

Among the slighter casualties may be mentioned a flesh wound on the right shoulder which irritated 'Frisco Bill'; Long Harry had lost a portion of one ear, and Tom Dolan was lame from a bruise caused by a boulder rolling down on his foot.

But the enemy had fared badly.

Over a dozen of redskins had been killed outright, and nearly as many more were wounded so dangerously that there was little chance of their lives.

Dusky Sam and the other leaders had escaped, but it was hoped they had received such a lesson that they would not wish to again dare the miners of Dead Man's Hollow.

CHAPTER XV.

JOE'S CONSPIRACY.

Joe Rawlings, alias Joe, the Devil, was a miner outwardly, but in reality a loafer.

In every mining camp there are men, or beings in the form of men, who take out a claim, but seldom work it. They prefer idling round, and if a saloon is running, they manage to dead-head more drinks of bad whisky than any one else in the place could afford to buy.

Joe was one of these creatures. His character was the very reverse of good. Though young, he had known the rules of a dozen jails, and once had narrowly escaped being hanged for a brutal assault on one of his jailers.

How he had wriggled out of a life sentence no one knew, but there were ugly whispers about, that some one high in authority had shared in the profits of some of his misdeeds. Of course this was pure slander, but all the same Joe Rawlings was a free man after a very few months of marching in the chain gang.

He had staked out a claim in Dead Man's Hollow, about the time that Bessie Glyndon and her father had reached there.

No sooner had he seen the pure, innocent face of Bessie, than he fell in love with her.

For a few weeks he was actually sober, and worked hard on his claim.

He kept his love a secret for two or three weeks, and was filled with a laudable ambition—to be worthy of an honest wife.

Then he met Bessie alone, and walking by her side, told of his love.

She was not surprised at the suddenness of the proposal, for often a girl of marriageable age became a wife within a few weeks of her arrival at a mining camp.

But Bessie knew Joe's character, and in her pure heart loathed the sight of a man whose whole life had been one of crime and bad conduct.

Firmly, but kindly, Bessie told him she was sorry for him, but that she could never be his wife.

Joe walked away without a word.

For three days he worked hard on his claim, and was

fairly successful. Then he went again to Bessie, and once more offered his hand and heart to the fascinating and charming girl.

Again he was refused; this time even more emphatically than before.

Joe grumbled a little, but waited his opportunity. He knew that Bessie was worth winning, and he was really in love with her—he would show himself worthy. He became sober, worked as hard as any in the hollow, and on the following Sunday, a week after his refusal, put on a clean red shirt, combed his hair, made himself as clean-looking as he knew how, and waited for Bessie.

He knew her habits, and calculated rightly that she would walk up the hillside that afternoon.

In a lonely part of the gulch he met her, and courteously raised his broad-brimmed hat, and extended his hand.

The girl took it, and spoke cheerfully to Joe. She respected his efforts to reform, and gave a few words of pleasant encouragement; but no sooner had she done so than Joe again asked her to marry him.

"I cannot, Joe; believe me, my answer will be ever the same."

"Why?"

"I do not love you."

"I love you, an' I'll make you a good husband."

"Perhaps so; but——"

She paused, and Joe saw her hesitation.

"I see it. It's what I've been in the past as is ag'in me."

"No, Joe; if I loved you, I would be your wife."

"Why can't you be my wife, anyway?"

"It would be wrong; besides it would be unfair for all the love to be on one side."

Joe was struggling with himself.

His better nature told him that Bessie Glyndon was right, but his more natural mood whispered that he would be a fool to give way to a chit of a girl.

"Ag'in I asks you. Will you be my wife?"

"No, Joe; I never will."

"I'll bet you will be, though, or I'm wrongly named."

Joe Rawlings walked away, cursing himself and all women in general, but Bessie more especially.

Every day he made some excuse and spoke to Bessie, until her father had to interfere.

A short, sharp fight proved that Miner Glyndon was the better man, and Joe Rawlings gave himself up to drinking and gaming.

Joe did all he could to prove that his nickname was well earned, and more than once Long Harry gave warning that the regulators were watching him, and that unless he was more careful, he would be marched out of the hollow.

He took but little heed of the warning, but continued his wild and lawless life, fully resolved that no matter what the result to himself, he would get Bessie for himself.

But how?

That was just the very difficulty which confronted him. How often men and boys plan some great achievement, the effect of which would be immense, but the *modus operandi* would not present itself in tangible form.

Joe thought of a variety of plans, but each one had its dangers. Bessie must be his lawful wife or he could not claim the property which she possessed.

He knew that she was so popular that his life would be the forfeit if, in any way, he injured or wronged her.

Joe Rawlings was in a quandary. He strolled down the long street and entered the gaming room kept by Nance, the wife of a man who had drifted into the new town, and who was known as Lucky Bob.

"What's the matter, Joe?" she asked.

"Nothin'," he growled, brusquely.

"That ain't true. Hev you seen the ghost of the Hollow?"

"No, Nance, I——"

"'Cause they do say as how another warnin' has been given by the ghosts of those who took up the first claims."

"I've seen no ghosts, but I'd like to make a ghost of some one."

Nance drew nearer to him—Joe was a favorite of hers—and whispered in his ear the inquiry:

"Who?"

Joe looked round at the gamblers. They were all too intent on play to notice the surly and at no time welcome miner.

"Jack," he answered, in a whisper.

"What Jack?"

"Chambers."

"Why?"

The conversation was in a whisper, and neither wasted breath.

"I want the gal."

"Bessie?"

"Yes."

"Good! I'll help you."

Nance's eyes fairly watered with joy as she thought of the revenge she would now get. She had always hated Bessie Glyndon.

It was now Joe who was puzzled, and he asked Nance why she was so willing to help him.

"I hate her," was the reply, given very emphatically.

"What is your price?" Joe asked, as he saw the woman was in earnest.

She laughed, nudged him in the ribs, and said she would talk of that some other time.

An hour later Joe and Nance were talking in a room alone.

Nance had formulated a scheme, which she was sure would work well, and secure the assent of Bessie to a marriage with the reckless, dissipated miner.

Had Joe allowed his sober reason to dictate or influence him, he never would have entered into a compact such as had been agreed upon with Nance; but he was actuated by greed and passion.

When the next day he met Bessie, he was courteous, and refrained from speaking again of his hopeless love.

The girl was pleased, and felt that there was some good, after all, in the scamp who had earned such an unenviable name.

Joe worked all day on his claim, and struck quite a rich vein.

There was wealth in store for him, if he would only go steadily to work and leave bad whisky and the gaming table alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROUTING OF THE SIOUX.

Joe, the Devil, had no opportunity for several days of putting into execution the plot devised by Nance; for early on the second day the whole of the miners of the hollow were aroused by a cry, which sent a thrill of terror into every heart.

One of the newly-appointed regulators which had been organized to look after the camp, who had been on duty all night, watching the camp, roused the miners with the dread cry:

"The hills are covered with Injuns! We are surrounded!"

It needed no second warning. Every miner was out of his tent in an instant, and was looking at his rifle.

On the hill could be seen, here and there, a redskin, while on the other side, entering the hollow from the Red Canyon, a number of Sioux warriors, well mounted and armed, and led by a chief, were rapidly nearing the camp.

The warriors halted, and evidently were arranging their plan of campaign.

'Frisco Bill and Long Harry called the miners together, and 'Frisco Bill addressed them, with all the authority of his mayoralty to back his words.

"You see, boys," he said, "the redskins have not yet had enough cold lead. We have got to kill every mother's son of them, or they will kill us. It is no time to talk about the rights of the red man. We are here, an' we mean to stay."

"Thet's so; don't yer forget it," shouted a broad-shouldered miner.

"Boys, all you've got to remember this bout is, to kill all you can, an' spare none. Act under our orders an' there'll be less Injuns to-night than there are now."

Long Harry agreed with the mayor, that the Indians would not charge the camp, for to do so would be most disastrous. In this the miners were wrong, for only a very few minutes elapsed before the rattling of rifle discharges was heard from the east side, followed by a volley from the hill, and another from the Red Canyon.

From the south, with infernal yells, hideously painted faces, and the gaudy trappings of their war costumes streaming behind them, over a hundred warriors rushed on with frightful impetuosity, as if thoroughly determined to take the camp by storm.

As soon as they got within fair rifle range, a deadly fire was poured in on them from the pits and the trenches, which formed excellent earthworks for the miners of Dead Man's Hollow.

Many saddles were emptied, and a great number of the warriors realized that the miners knew how to take careful and accurate aim.

Undismayed by the death of the first who fell in the south side charge, the surviving warriors rushed on, right over their bodies; but as they drew nearer, the execution became greater; line after line of those in the lead was almost obliterated by the destructive fire.

Jack Chambers was in command of the miners at that point, and he was ably seconded by Dolan.

In fact, both boys showed generalship equal to that displayed by many an officer in the great war.

Jack was cool and collected.

He knew when to fire, and had also discrimination and tact; therefore, no bullets were wasted.

Soon the ridge was literally strewn with dead Indians, dead horses, and horses without riders.

"They are brave fellows!" Jack exclaimed, as he saw a number of the warriors stop fighting to carry away the dead of their tribe.

Sometimes a bullet would crash into the body of a brave who was carrying a dead Sioux, and both would roll over, corpse clutching corpse.

Jack had given implicit directions that in no case was any miner to fire intentionally on those engaged in removing the dead or wounded.

The young general was sheltered behind a huge bowlder, and while able to see all that was going on, and to participate in the rifle battle, yet was protected against the enemy's weapons.

Only once did he lose his presence of mind.

He got so enthusiastic that he raised his head to see the effect of a volley he had just ordered.

His head was a good target, and a bullet went scraping through his hat and ploughed a furrow through his hair.

"By Jove! Dolan," he exclaimed, "a few more like that and I shall be bald."

"Well, Bessie will have all the less to pull at," Tom answered, jestingly.

The charging Sioux wavered, and their reserves ceased to come up—then fell back, carrying every dead and wounded Sioux brave with them.

The charge was broken, the repulse complete.

The attacking parties from the north and east, who were comparatively weak, fell back precipitately as soon as they saw the failure of the stronger and more confident force on the south. Over sixty Indians at least had been killed on the morning of that day.

Dead Man's Hollow once more deserved its name, for it was a veritable gulch of dead men.

The miners were fortunate. One of 'Frisco Bill's command had been killed, and Jack Chambers had also lost one.

Mat Ransom courted his fate for having killed a brave. At the moment the Indians commenced their retreat, he leaped from his shelter and started to get his victim's scalp as a trophy, knowing that the body would be carried away by the Sioux.

"Come back, Mat," shouted Jack.

"You fool, come back!" angrily exclaimed Dolan, but Ransom heard not or was reckless. The body of the Sioux was lying by itself, and was apparently unnoticed by the braves who were stopping behind to carry off the dead.

"Mat, you will get shot," once more Jack shouted, but the miner laughed heartily, and leaped from stone to stone until within a few paces of the dead Sioux.

He threw up his arms, leaped a couple of feet in the air, and dropped dead. A bullet had pierced his brain.

As the Indians were retreating Jack had an old twelve-pounder brought to the front, charged with iron slugs and slag full to the muzzle.

The thunderous explosion not only added to the number of the killed but increased the panic of the retreating enemy.

Long Harry came up with a reinforcement for Jack,

and was surprised to find that the young miner of claim 333 had so effectually routed the Indians.

"Great Scott! look hyer!" exclaimed the regular chief.

"A dead horse," said Jack.

"Yes, but whose?"

"A Sioux brave, I guess."

"Thet's it, but, my boy, that there hoss was the chief's, as I'm a livin' sinner."

"I know it," answered Jack, calmly.

"You do, eh?"

"Yes, I shot it, and saw the chief turn a somersault over its head; I fired again and think I sent a bullet through the chief's leg."

"Bravo, Jack! If you hev killed that ther chief the United States government, blow me, it 'ud give you a pension."

"I didn't kill him, I only winged him."

"More's the pity. Any killed?"

"One—poor, silly Mat Ransom."

"Leave his body to me, I'll bury it."

"All right."

Jack was tired and wanted rest. The Indians had been repulsed, and he felt he could afford to take time, if only to assure Bessie that he was unhurt.

"Say, boys," exclaimed Long Harry, as soon as Jack and Tom had gone, "we'll bury Mat Ransom, so that the Injuns'll get his scalp, eh?"

Long Harry winked as he spoke and some of the old timers knew what he meant.

They took Ransom's body about a quarter of a mile from the camp, and placed it near by a deep pit.

A dozen willing hands then began to pile stones up inside the pit, and when they had sufficient in number they took Mat's body and placed it on the heap of rocks.

But that was not sufficient.

Some deep-laid plan was evidently to be worked out by the miners, for they deliberately piled more stones on poor Ransom's inanimate body.

It was a strange burial.

The body was only half covered.

The head entirely hidden with stones, some portions of the trunk exposed. What could it all mean?

The miners, when they were satisfied with the weight of stones heaped upon the body of their dead comrade, retired to the camp.

They had a good view of Ransom's grave, and every miner in the hollow was invited to watch, for Long Harry had managed to have the report circulated that Dan, the Scout, had seen the Indians approaching in the direction of Ransom's grave.

With strained and eager eyes the men looked for their red-skinned enemy.

They had not long to wait, for in less than half an hour, two hundred Sioux warriors had reached the grave, and a large number had started pulling away the stones, to reach their victim, so that they could secure his scalp.

And then—what a sight was presented!

A tremendous explosion occurred in the grave, and, amid clouds of stones, fire and smoke, fifty dead and crippled Indians were scattered over that already blood-stained field.

The explosion shook the hills, and when Jack Chambers knew its cause and the effect, he took pencil and paper, and extemporized in this fashion:

"The hills that shake, although unrent,
As if an earthquake passed—
The thousand shapeless things all driven
In cloud and flame athwart the heaven,
By that tremendous blast—
Proclaimed the conflict o'er."

Long Harry knew the Indian character well, and he rightly conjectured that the Sioux were waiting for the miners to withdraw so that they might take Mat Ransom's scalp.

Harry had placed a large keg of powder at the bottom of the grave under the first pile of stones; to the keg he had attached a long piece of lighted fuse. He had calculated the time so well, that the igniting spark reached the powder at exactly the time when the most Indians were at work in the grave.

The slaughter was frightful, and was never forgotten by the Sioux.

Years after, when the chief was captured by the United States troops, he recalled that incident in Dead Man's Hollow, and said to his captors:

"We were brave, but I knew we should at last be beaten, for we could not fight against white men who shot straight from the holes in the ground—holes which killed Indians after the white men left them."

The Sioux left the hollow, dispirited and broken-hearted.

Vowing to have revenge on the white men, and never to bury the hatchet until that revenge was full and complete, they yet were superstitious, and with one accord resolved never again to attempt a raid on the miners of Dead Man's Hollow.

This resolve was faithfully kept, and while other portions of the Black Hills suffered from the Sioux and Crows, the hollow was left severely alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

JACK'S PERIL.

For several days the battle with the Indians and the avenging of the death of Mat Ransom, diverted the thoughts of the miners from most other matters.

But, like every other great event, its importance as a topic of conversation died out, and work on the claims, drinking in saloons, and gambling in the hells soon received their old-time attention.

Jack was all excitement. In eight days he and his partners would start to Yankton to attend the trial arising out of the claim made by Dick Galvin.

But that was not the cause of Jack's excitement. It was far different to any arising from a prospective lawsuit. The day before he was to start all the miners were to be invited to a big gathering, at which Bessie Glyndon was to become the wife of the young miner of claim 333.

So that the trip to Yankton was to be the wedding trip of our young hero.

Seven days more and the cup of his happiness would be full.

Bessie had herself proposed the date, for she feared Jack might meet with some injury on the journey, and she wanted to be by his side.

Jack did not neglect work, neither did his partners; the gold they found day after day more than justified the

old miner's prophecy that they had struck the richest pay streak in the Black Hills.

Sometimes their less fortunate comrades would jest significantly, and remark that the three miners were not going to leave much gold for Dick Galvin, if he proved his claim.

But 'Frisco Bill only laughed, and told them that after the trial he was going East, and Galvin, if he proved his title, was welcome to all the gold that was left.

"The Bessie" was nearly as good a claim, and on the day that charming Bessie changed her name, there was a fair presumption that she would be worth close on a quarter of a million dollars. Not by any means a bad dowry for a young girl.

The time passed away pleasantly for the lovers, and both Bessie and Jack were excited at the thought of the coming wedding.

It wanted only two days when Joe, who had been keeping quiet, again sought Nance, and talked for a long time with her.

When he left her cabin, he sought out two of the worst characters in the whole Hollow and engaged them in some work which he had in contemplation.

It was late and as dark as Erebus when Jack, who had left the company of Bessie an hour before, was about turning in for a night's rest.

He had thrown off his jacket, and was stretching his arms about his head, while he indulged in a most unmistakable yawn.

But the yawn came to an abrupt termination. A boy who was often employed to carry messages to and from the miners, carry tools or do other work, but who bore a very bad character, pushed open the door, and put in his head.

"Yer wanted," he said.

"Who wants me?"

"The gal."

"Who?"

"Bessie Glyndon; she said as how yer was to be quick, she was in trouble."

Jack threw on his jacket, and was about to rush off to Bessie's residence, when something told him that it was strange for his betrothed to send in such a manner, and by such a messenger.

Jack was cautious, although he imagined no danger would overtake him.

Why should there be any need for fear?

It was natural that Bessie should send to him if she were in trouble.

This hesitancy vanished, and he prepared to start, but before he did so, he wrote on a slip of paper:

"Gone to Bessie's; sent for; messenger, Ben."

He took a stick and propped it up on the rude table, and then placed the note on the top of it.

"There now, that will attract attention if I don't return soon."

He opened the door, and found that not only was the night dark, but that the rain was pouring down in torrents.

It was a grewsome night, and had it not been that our young hero was very much in love, he would not have relished the quarter of a mile he had to walk to where Bessie was staying.

But he was invulnerable to the weather, for his heart was warm with love of his betrothed.

"Hello! What's that?" he suddenly ejaculated, as he felt something press round him tightly.

His wonder was increased when he found that not only had he been effectually pinioned by a rope passing round his waist, and imprisoning his arms, but that a gag was quickly forced into his mouth, and he was powerless in the hands of unseen and unknown enemies.

He struggled with his assailants, but they had the advantage. He was in the dark, and knew not where to kick—his arms were too firmly tied for him to strike.

Even the luxury of kicking was soon denied him, for another rope was passed around his legs, and he was thrown on his back.

Jack found himself being carried over stones and rocks, his bearers stumbling often in the intense darkness; but at last, after an unfortunate and unpleasant journey of half an hour, he was thrown down on a hard floor, far from gently.

Unable to move, equally unable to call out, he had still another obstacle to his comfort, for the last thing his captors did was to tie a bandage tightly over his eyes.

In this uncomfortable condition he was left to pass away the hours of the night.

* * * * *

Bessie had gone to bed. She had been looking out at the storm, and feeling nervous and alarmed.

Why, she knew not; but a strange foreboding of evil made her feel wretched.

The hour of midnight had come and gone, and Bessie resolved that she would retire to rest.

But one more look out at the storm she must have.

She opened the door; the rain beat into her face, and extinguished her light.

When she relighted her candle, she was horror-struck to see Joe, the Devil, standing just inside the door, with his back leaning against it.

He had a pistol in his hand, pointed at the girl.

"Speak or cry out, an' I'll shoot," he whispered, harshly.

"What do you want?" she asked, frightened nearly out of her wits.

"Listen to me, Bess Glyndon. I've asked you heaps o' times to be my wife, an' you've allus refused."

"As I always shall do," she said.

"Not so loud, or I'll——" And the man pointed at the pistol which still covered her.

"It's my turn now," he said. "Do you love Jack Chambers? But there, you needn't answer; I know you do. But do you love him enough to save his life?"

"Oh, tell me, is he sick? What is the matter with him? Do say—oh, please, Joe, tell me."

"He is a prisoner, an' will be killed in two hours."

Joe looked straight at the girl to see the effect of his words. Bessie turned white and steadied herself by leaning her hand on the table; but she did not speak.

"I can save him, an' I will if you swear you'll be my wife."

"And if I don't?"

"Then he dies."

"It is some trick of yours, and I am ashamed of you, Joe."

"It's no trick, but truth, I tell yer, Bess; I've got the

whip hand now. You'll be my wife or he dies. Shout an' give an alarm an' git Long Harry arter me, an' he dies just the same. I've got the lines laid straight. Now then, will yer promise?"

"No!"

"Think, if Jack dies it'll be you who killed him. You can save his life by being my wife."

"That I will never be."

"Then he shall die, an' you'll be sorry."

"Sorry if he dies, yes, but not because I did not consent to be your wife. No, Joe, you don't know me; if he dies, I shall die, too, and if we can't live together, we can die at the same time and spend eternity together."

"All this talk won't save him. Will you spare his life by being my wife?"

"No!"

"Then he'll die."

"Help!" shouted Bessie, as loudly as she could.

"You fool, then you'll die, too," hissed Joe Rawlings, and as the words left his lips the place was shaken by the report of a pistol shot, and the room was filled with smoke.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HALT!"

Jack Chambers had not left the shanty half an hour before Tom Dolan jumped from his bed and stared round him.

He had been troubled by a dream, but what it was about he could not remember.

He was uneasy and anxious. In that state of mind, when the nerves are all strung to their highest tension, he felt that he would like company.

"Jack!" he whispered, lowly. There was no answer. The two boys shared the shanty between them, while their partner, Frisco Bill, occupied another a few yards away.

"Jack, are you asleep?"

There was no response to the whispered question, and Tom crossed the little room to the stretcher on which Jack slept.

It was untenanted.

"That's strange," muttered Tom; "where can he be?"

He stumbled over something, and the shock only added to his nervous fears.

"Jack!"

It was no longer a whisper, but a pretty loud shout.

"Jack, confound you, where have you got to?"

Tom kept up his courage by a continual appeal to Jack, although he knew his partner was not there. Then he managed to get a light, and his eye wandered over the room and into every corner, but without satisfying him as to Jack's whereabouts.

He saw the slip of paper, which his partner had written and propped up on the table.

Tom read it, looked at it as he held the bit of writing at arm's length, and then threw it down.

"Gone to Bessie Glyndon's," he muttered. "I don't like that. What is he doing there this time of night? Something unusual. It's not right. By Jove! I fear it's all wrong."

Tom muttered and grumbled, walked up and down the

little space, sat on Jack's bed, jumped up, and then added to his limited apparel.

"I'll ask Bill," was his sensible remark, as he stuck his revolver in his belt and left the shanty.

"Bill! get up, Bill!"

'Frisco Bill snored like a whole company of hogs, and Tom got very impatient.

Crossing to the bed, he gave his senior partner a vigorous dig in the ribs.

It was a dangerous thing to do, for Bill mechanically drew his revolver from under his head and covered Tom.

"Now, then, stranger, what's the row?" he ejaculated.

Tom held up the lantern, and Bill let fall the revolver as he saw his partner's face.

"What's the matter, Tom? Anything wrong?"

"That's just what I don't know, so I came to you. Read that"

'Frisco Bill did as he was requested and questioned Tom closely about the manner in which he found it, and various other things.

"I'm darned if I can make it out—I guess there's something kind of crooked in it."

Bill had spoken slowly and with more than his usual deliberation. It was plain to be seen that his mind was troubled, and though he would not confess it, he felt that something was going on which meant mischief to his young partner.

"What can be done?" asked Tom.

"Wait till I get my togs on, an' we'll go to Bessie's house an' see if all is right."

"I never thought of that. I might have gone there first."

"No, my boy, you did right. We must act with caution."

In a short space 'Frisco Bill was ready, and looked quite formidable. In his belt he had three revolvers, and in his boot a good knife.

"Now then, pard," he ejaculated, "guess we can give 'em fits if there's any foul play going on."

A short distance from the claim Bill stopped and whistled softly.

"Hello! look here, Tom."

"What—where?" asked Dolan, excitedly.

Bill was waving his lantern about in a strangely delirious manner, and it was quite some time before Dolan could understand what affected the old miner so strongly.

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know; I'm not clear as to your meaning," answered Tom.

"Hush! speak low. See these footprints? There's been a scuffle—ground soft, footmarks deep. Hello!"

Bill had again forgotten his own word of caution, exclaiming loudly, and whistling far from quietly.

Tom had again to ask his partner's meaning.

"I tell you, Tom, there's foul work here. Look, four people walked to this spot, an' only three left it; where's the other one?"

Keen scented as a fox terrier, and able to follow a trail as well as any scout, Bill soon saw proofs that Jack had not gone to Bessie Glyndon's, but must have either returned home or gone up the mountain. As he had not gone back, it was evident the trail must be followed.

"No use going to the gal's house," said Bill.

"Why?"

"I tell you, Dolan, my boy, that Jack's in trouble, mebbe worse, so we had better follow the trail an' find him."

"Lead on, Bill; I'll follow."

After a few minutes' walk, the trail was a difficult one to follow, for the ground was harder and therefore but slight impressions of footprints could be found.

'Frisco Bill was not going to give up, but was more than ever determined to find the young fellow whose career had fallen in the same line as his own.

The strong man felt an intense liking for Jack, and the tears welled up in his eyes many times as he led the way up the mountain side.

"If Jack is dead," he muttered, "I'm afraid I'll go, too. I'm all broke up."

"What did you say?" asked Tom.

"Nothin', my boy, nothin'."

Bill darkened his lantern, for he felt that if any evil had been intended to Jack, the path to the caves would be watched, and a light would give his enemies an advantage.

Groping along, every inch of the way known to Bill, the two went on in silence.

Even the breathing of the two men seemed too loud.

Every sound startled them, but their nerves were high strung, when they suddenly found themselves confronted by a figure as dark as midnight, and received the command:

"Halt!"

They jumped as if a rifle had been fired close to them.

"Who are you?" asked Bill, getting his revolver securely gripped in his right hand.

"Who are you?" asked the figure, by way of reply.

"Bill Huntley, at your service," answered the miner.

"Now who are you?"

"Before I answer that question, you'll have to answer another."

"Shall I?"

"Yes, you will. Now tell me what you are prowling about here for?"

"Mind your own business."

"I am doing so. Now answer me."

"I'll be hanged if I do! But I'll look at you——"

Bill turned on the light of his lantern and held it up to the figure's face. He saw a man with pale face and shaggy beard. A slouch hat hid the upper part of his head, and his body was covered with a long black cloak.

He never flinched as the light flashed in his face, but as Bill examined him from head to foot he laughed heartily.

"Ha! ha! ha! do you know me?" he asked.

"No."

"Answer my question, then, and I'll introduce myself."

"We are looking for Jack Chambers."

Tom spoke up quickly, and with almost an angry voice.

"Oh! I guessed as much. Well, I'm Richard Galvin."

"The deuce!"

"If you like, but after all the best friend you've got. Go back to the camp, and see if your partner is not at Miss Glyndon's house."

"What do you know about the gal?"

"That is my business."

'Frisco Bill was nettled. He was suspicious that Galvin, or the one who assumed that personality, was in

league with the kidnapers who had made use of Bessie Glyndon's name to lure Jack away from his home.

Whether Galvin feared the consequences, or a kindly thought actuated him, he put an end to their suspicions at once.

"I tell you, Mayor Huntley, and you, Tom Dolan, that Jack Chambers was here, but he may need you at Bessie's house. The danger is to her, not him. Hurry, or I shall say that Jack's friends are his worst foes just now."

There was such an air of sincerity about the speech, that Tom urged his companion to obey its behest and hurry back to the camp.

Stumbling over rocks and roots of pine trees, the couple took the shortest cut to the young girl's residence, and saw that, when within a hundred yards of it, there were lights in the house.

"Blame it!" exclaimed Bill, "what a thing this love is! Here am I, who ought to be sleeping soundly, breaking my shins over stones, all on account of a love-sick miner."

Tom was almost delirious, for he thought Jack was in danger, and never did brother love another as he did the companion of his mining life.

If anything had happened to Jack he was firmly resolved to mete out unlimited vengeance on those who had wrought him evil.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF JOE'S LOVE DREAM.

A few minutes before 'Frisco Bill and Tom Dolan reached Bessie's residence, a figure crawled slowly up to the door and bent down to listen to the conversation within.

He heard Bessie refuse to be Joe's wife, and then he listened to the terrible threat:

"We will die together!"

Pushing open the door, he saw Joe standing with a revolver pointed at the young girl.

This was more than he could stand.

A shot was fired, but it was not from Joe's pistol.

Joe fell to the floor with a bullet hole through his chest, a little above his heart.

As the smoke cleared away, Bessie, who had fallen on a chair, exhausted and almost fainting, raised her head and, with a glad cry, sprang forward.

"Jack! my own Jack—is it you?"

"Yes, Bessie, darling, your own forever!"

"But——" She paused, looked at the fallen and dying man, and burst into tears.

Jack seized her in his arms, and so engrossed was he with his burden that he did not hear the door open. When he raised his head, with a consciousness that some one was present, he saw his two partners standing looking, first at him and then at the wounded miner.

"How came you here?" asked Jack, when Bessie's eyes were somewhat less full of tears.

"We can ask you the same," responded Tom.

"It's a long story."

"Let us look at this fellow first," said 'Frisco Bill.

As he raised Joe's head he could see plainly that death had set its mark there.

The man groaned. His face became distorted, and his body was clearly racked with pain.

"I've got to hand in my checks," he gasped.

Bill poured some whisky down his throat, and the spirits gave the wounded man a lease of a few minutes' life.

"She—is—— Oh, my God!"

"What?" asked Jack.

"Innocent," gasped Joe.

"We know that. Tell all—while you have power."

"Mayor, you've been good—oh, this pain—to me. I loved—her—an' swore to have her—but——"

The pain which Joe was suffering prevented him from speaking further.

Bill stooped down and with almost a savage manner asked:

"Who helped you? Who were your pals?"

"I—I am—guilty—don't—blame any—— God have mercy!"

The man suddenly raised himself, and seeing Bessie crying, said:

"Forgive—me—oh, do, or I dare not die."

"I forgive you, Joe. But ask God to forgive you, and take you to Himself."

Joe looked pleased, a smile hovered round his mouth; he laid down his head and gave one gasp for breath.

All was over. Joe, whose evil deeds had wrought his ruin, was called to the bar of the Eternal, where alone equal justice is rendered.

Explanations had to be made and given, and on all sides surprise was expressed as each gave an account of the night's proceedings.

"When I was thrown down in the cave, gagged and bound," said Jack, "I gave up all for lost. I struggled to free myself, but could not loosen my hands. The cave was wet and slimy, and once a snake wriggled across my face. Every moment I expected would be my last."

"I thought I had been there many hours, but it was only an hour at most."

"I heard a voice whisper 'Hush!' and then I felt my hands gradually unbound, and the gag removed from my mouth."

"Don't speak a word," said my deliverer, "but hurry to Bessie Glyndon; she is in danger."

"The strange man lent me a cloak."

"Disguise yourself and hurry," he said. I did so.

"When I got here, Joe—poor wretch—was threatening to kill Bessie. I fired, and—that is all."

"Who was it who saved you, Jack?"

"I don't know; he would not tell."

"I guess it was Galvin," said Bill.

"Yes."

"Galvin?"

Bill had to tell his story; and, as Bessie listened to it, her face became crimson, for she remembered how she, too, had been saved from a terrible fate by an unknown dweller of the mountain caves.

Before the story was finished, most of the miners of the Hollow had risen from their beds and flocked round the young heroine's house.

The cheering which greeted her, when she appeared at the door, proved what a strong hold she had on the hearts of those rough men.

She was their "luck," they said.

A mascot, which had been to the Hollow an omen of good fortune.

Mayor Huntley received his due share of praise, while Jack and Tom were lionized until, as Tom declared, he was heartily sick of hearing his name mentioned.

'Frisco Bill was called on one side by Long Harry, and it was noticed that a whispered conversation between them was of more than ordinary interest.

"Tell them yourself," Bill was heard to say.

"No; I ain't got the gift of the gab like yer."

"Ha! ha! ha! that's good; but we'll see. Boys, Long Harry has a proposition to make," Bill shouted.

"No, no; 'Frisco Bill'll tell yer."

"Not exactly. Out with it, Harry."

"Long Harry has the floor!" shouted one.

"Good for him!"

"Now then, Harry, spit it out."

Seeing that it was no use refusing, Harry jumped on a stump, and after clearing his throat, began:

"Yer see, boys, I guess yer' all know that our luck—yer know that's what pretty Bessie is—will be Mrs. Jack Chambers in two days. Now, I've been thinkin' as how she deserves a reward for her courage, and a better fate than——"

"Hi! hi! hi!"

"Oh!"

"Thet's a blow for young Jack."

Long Harry was bewildered. He knew he had made a mess of it, but how, he did not know until Bill whispered into his ear. Then the rough and weather-beaten miner blushed like a girl, though the carmine had to struggle hard to show itself on his bronzed cheeks.

"Go on, Harry," shouted several.

"Yer see I ain't used to public speechifying, an' I gets mixed——"

"Never mix yer drinks, my boy," one miner shouted, by way of jest, and the hearty laugh which greeted the sally showed that broad humor was appreciated.

"I meant," continued Harry, when the laugh had subsided, "that it 'u'd be as well if the splicin' took place to-day—the sun is just risin'."

"Good!"

"Bully fer yer."

"Thet's it, exactly."

"Look how the young uns are slidin' away."

The expression of all were to the same purpose.

It was evident that the wedding would have to take place that day, or there would be no peace in Dead Man's Hollow.

No one had obtained much sleep that night, but that did not matter; excitement took the place of rest, and every man set to work to make the day one to be long talked of by the miners of Dakota.

CHAPTER XX.

A WEDDING IN THE CAMP.

Four o'clock in the afternoon was fixed for the wedding.

By that time every miner in the Hollow had a clean face, as well as a clean shirt, in honor of the occasion.

As the hour approached, Jack and Bessie were escorted to the platform, and had to receive the congratulations of their friends.

It was a strange prelude to a wedding.

Exactly at the hour appointed a clergyman who had arrived opportunely, not expecting to be wanted before the following day, leaped, with an athletic agility, upon the platform.

As he did so, a cheer broke out from the crowd, and it was repeated over and over again.

The divine was well used to the rough life led in the mining camps, and he knew that under the rude, uncultivated exterior of the miners, hearts warm and honest beat with true heartiness.

He took Long Harry's hand in his, and gave it a vigorous shake.

"Splice them as tight as that 'ere grip an' you'll do, parson," exclaimed Harry, as he rubbed his fingers which had been nearly crushed by the hearty grasp of the clergyman.

The ceremony was then proceeded with, and in a few minutes, by the law of the land, Jack Chambers had taken to himself a wife, and Bessie Glyndon had exchanged her father's name for that of her new protector.

As the last words of the benediction were pronounced, two hundred rifles were pointed skyward, and two hundred reports made the hills echo again and again.

Long Harry waved his hand for silence.

"Yer see, boys," he said, "'Frisco Bill, our mayor, give this 'ere affair into my hands. 'Do as you like, Harry,' says he, an' I done it. Now, boys, the time for a weddin' gift hes come. Pard, git out yer dust. I'm gwine to take up a collection toward housekeepin'."

Many a man dropped an ounce of gold dust into the hat which Harry carried, and when he had got his hat filled he started off with another, and yet it was not enough.

By the time the collection was over, Bessie had received over ten thousand dollars' worth of gold as her wedding present.

Then there were more volleys fired, and more cheering.

In the midst of it all, as the bridal party was preparing to retire, a man was seen pushing his way toward the platform.

He was a stranger, but something in his appearance made all acknowledge his superiority.

He was enveloped in a long black cloak, which he threw on one side ere he reached the platform.

"Friends!" he shouted, "I've come to give my wedding present to the charming bride. You don't know me, and yet I have lived here among you. I am Richard Galvin."

Had he suddenly fired a bomb in their midst they could not have been more surprised.

They were too much astonished to speak, and so he continued:

"After the murder of George Galvin I took his claim and worked it. I had four partners, and we bought the whole Hollow from the Sioux Indians—it was theirs to sell, don't you know? Well, we had a good title to it, but some of the tribe wanted both the money and the land, and they murdered two of my partners, and the third one tried to murder me. He thought he had succeeded, but I lived and haunted him, until his very life was a burden. I was crazed with the sight of blood, and, as I now know, was mad for a time.

"I made up my mind that as the land was mine, bought and paid for it, I wouldn't let anyone work it. Many tried, but the Indians cleared them out. At last some

more came, and I frightened them by means of a painted skeleton and a shower of skulls, which I rolled down the hill from my retreat.

"When Tom Dolan and Jack Chambers came I tried to scare them, but they wouldn't scare, and I got to like them. They had enemies, and I frustrated many a plot against them. The bride will tell you how I rescued her from the men you came near hanging—and rightly, too; while Jack remembers me last night loosening his bonds and giving him liberty to get a young wife.

"Now, boys, I've nearly done. I am rich—richer far than any score of you—I don't say this in a boasting spirit. I am the owner of the whole Hollow. On the first of next month my title will be proved. The government has recognized the validity of my purchase from the Indians."

When Galvin had got as far as this in his speech there were numerous signs of uneasiness on the part of his auditors. The assertions were getting unpleasantly serious, and the miners did not relish the clear statement of the right of this man to turn them from their claims.

The speaker saw this, but was unmoved. He paused only a minute and then resumed his speech.

"I have here," he said, pointing to a paper which he had taken from his pocket, "a deed of gift, conferring on the bridal pair a clear title to the claim known as 'The Bessie,' and also to claim three hundred and thirty-three."

"The latter, however, is coupled with a proviso, that its entire profits shall be equally divided between the three who have hertofore claimed it.

"One word more, and I have done. I am commissioned by a syndicate to purchase—if the owners are willing to sell—the two claims, for the sum of two millions in cash. And I am also ready to say, that each of those present who wishes a clear title to the claim he is working, can have it free of all expense. I not only relinquish my right to the Hollow, but give free titles to the land, and buy back a portion of it for two millions.

"I have done. The murder of my brother is avenged, and a city will rise from the spot which he found a rocky wilderness, and which you have made a mining camp."

Everyone recognized Galvin's generosity, even though many were inclined to doubt his title.

Jack and his wife thanked their benefactor heartily, and with 'Frisco Bill and Tom Dolan, agreed to sell the two claims for the substantial sum offered.

CHAPTER XXI.

TEN YEARS LATER.

In one of the prettiest cottages on the Hudson, a happy party had gathered to celebrate the anniversary of a wedding.

The party consisted of our old friends and their families. John Chambers, Esq., rich and respected, with his wife, the pretty and now more mature Bessie, were celebrating the tenth anniversary of their wedding, which took place in the mining camp of Dead Man's Hollow.

They had gathered round them three lovely children to bless and gladden their home.

A bearded man, straight as an arrow, but bronzed and slightly weather-beaten, is there, by the side of a matronly

looking lady, who thinks there is no one in the world to equal Congressman William Huntley, whose name she has shared for eight years.

But we must not forget another group, for there is our old friend, Tom Dolan, and with him also a wife and two boys.

How happy is that reunion! How they talk over old times!

"Papa," suddenly exclaimed young Thomas Chambers, who was proud of his eight years of life.

"What is it, my boy?"

"Wouldn't the story of your life in the Black Hills be fine published in the Brave and Bold Library?"

"Bless you, my boy," said Jack Chambers, as he stooped and kissed the pretty mouth of the child.

"The story shall be told, youngsters, but there is one thing that I always regret."

"What is that, papa?"

"I did not send to my mother as often as I should. Boys, wherever you are, however difficult it may be to send word home, remember there are loving eyes watching every mail for news of the wandering ones. Let your mother's happiness be your first care."

As our friend said it, his voice was almost choked with sobs. For he had returned to Brooklyn only just in time to close his dear mother's eyes in death.

She had lived to see her son wealthy, but oftentimes he had reproached himself, and wondered whether his wealth was worth the anxious waiting and the dreary longing of a fond mother, who looked in vain for her wandering boy.

Our story is ended. The three men who have been our constant companions—'Frisco Bill, Tom and Jack—are each useful members of society, and often in the halls of Congress has 'Frisco Bill raised his voice on behalf of a more lenient treatment of our aboriginal tribes.

Long Harry is an influential man in Dakota, and was recently a prominent speaker in favor of the admission of the Territory to the dignity of Statehood.

Bessie—we must still call her so—has read over this story, as we have written it, and has but one objection—she says that our description of her husband has been too cold. "He is the noblest man I ever met," she said, just now, and then added: "But Dolan and dear old 'Frisco Bill, why they are too sweet for anything." By which femininity it will be seen that Bessie has "caught on" to some Eastern expressions of girlish delight.

Bessie's younger brother is doing well at college, and her sister has already won for herself hosts of admirers.

We leave the characters which have made up our story with reluctance, and hope that all our readers are equally sorry to part with the two boy miners.

THE END.

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